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OR,

THE GREAT DETECTIVE'S SHADOW GUARD.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "JOE PHENIX, THE POLICE SPY,"
"THE WOLVES OF NEW YORK," "THE
FRESH OF 'FRISCO," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

THE great hands of Trinity's ancient clock pointed to the hour of nine, and the money center of the metropolis—New York, the Empire City of the Western world—far-famed Wall street, was shaking off its "downy lethargy" and preparing for the day's business.

All the "down" Broadway cars were crowded with the lords and lackeys of the commercial world, hurrying to business.

From one of the cars descended a lion-like man—a gentleman of forty, or thereabouts, tall, powerfully-built, and with that peculiar air about him which denotes the leader, born to command.

"SUCCESS CROWNS OUR EFFORTS!" CRIED THE VILLAINOUS SECRETARY. "SUCCESS CROWNS MY EFFORTS!" RESPONDED JOE PHENIX.

This eagle-eyed, massive-featured gentleman was the celebrated detective, Joseph Phenix, renowned far and wide as being one of the most successful man-hunters that the metropolis had ever known.

Those of our readers who have followed the fortunes of this man of ice and iron as depicted in the novels wherein he figured as one of the principal characters, know all the particulars of his wondrous history, but to those who now encounter him for the first time we will simply say that Joe Phenix, as he was always called, won his reputation as a detective as one of the regular bloodhounds of the city, then, having accumulated a moderate fortune as the result of his endeavors, retired from the police force and set up as a private detective, locating his office in Wall street, right in the heart of the money center of the metropolis.

He followed his profession now for amusement, as he had ample means to satisfy his simple wants, and among those who knew him it was understood that he did not care to trouble himself about any small matters, but if a big case was brought to his notice—an affair which puzzled the ordinary bloodhounds of the law, and one with which they could do nothing, Joe Phenix would undertake the task with alacrity; as a rule, too, it was but seldom he was baffled.

On this particular morning the detective had nothing in hand; he was on his way to his office to inspect his mail, and had made up his mind that unless something turned up to engage his attention he would take a little trip to the country for a few days.

Joe Phenix's office was located in one of the huge buildings, towering heavenward, which that modern invention, the elevator, has made possible and profitable.

His assistant, Tony Western, a muscular young man of twenty-five, was in the office when Joe Phenix arrived.

"Any mail, Tony?" the great detective asked.

"Only a single letter, sir."

Joe Phenix took a seat at his desk and took a look at the envelope.

It was what is known as a "drop letter," having been posted in the city.

The detective opened the missive and a check fell out upon the desk.

It was for a hundred dollars, drawn to the order of one George F. Jones and bore the signature of Russell Sage, one of the oldest and most prominent men in Wall street.

"What does this mean?" the detective muttered to himself as he took up the check.

Then he turned the bit of paper over and saw that it bore the signature of George F. Jones on the back.

"Ah, I see! As it is indorsed it is just as good as so much cash, but who is George F. Jones?"

Then the detective read the letter which ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR:—Inclosed please find check for one hundred dollars. I desire to consult you upon a little business matter and send check as a guarantee of good faith. Have the kindness to assume a disguise, so that your identity will not be suspected by any acquaintance, and meet me at the corner of Broadway and Fiftieth street at two o'clock this afternoon."

"Stand on the north-eastern corner, with a folded newspaper in your hand. I will be in a hack and will halt and address you as Mr. Jones, then you must get in."

"It is necessary for me to have a private interview with you and I desire to arrange the affair in such a way that no one can suspect that there has been a meeting between us."

And at this point the letter came to an abrupt end, there being no signature.

Joe Phenix placed the letter upon the desk and then took up the check and examined it again.

Tony Western, glancing up from his newspaper, saw that his principal seemed perplexed and ventured to ask:

"Anything out of the way, sir?"

Joe Phenix had a great deal of confidence in Tony Western's judgment, for he regarded him as being one of the most promising young men in the detective business, so he requested him to inspect the letter and check.

"Just give me your opinion about this matter?" he said.

Tony Western read the letter and then examined the check.

"Well, I don't know, governor," he remarked, with a dubious shake of the head. "If you were a millionaire now, worth the kidnapping, I should say that it was a little game to get at you."

"It does look like a 'plant,' for a fact!" the detective declared.

"That's so! After you were in the coach the man would work the chloroform act and then it would be, 'good-by John!'"

"Well, as I am not a millionaire, and it would not be possible to make anything by kidnapping me, I suppose that the only explanation of the mystery is, that if it is a game to entrap me, it proceeds from some man who has cause to want to get square—some criminal whom I have been instrumental in placing behind the bars."

"Yes, but then it is odd that any man of that class should be willing to put up a hundred dol-

lar check as a bait to draw you on. I am supposing, you know, that the check is good," the other observed, thoughtfully.

"Well, that matter can be quickly decided. Take the check to Russell Sage's office, ask if it is all right, and find out if they know anything about this Mr. George F. Jones," the detective said.

Tony Western departed with the check and Joe Phenix turned his attention to the morning newspaper.

In twenty minutes Tony Western returned.

"The check is all right and you can put it in the bank as soon as you like," Western announced. "Jones is a broker, doing business in New street, a first-class man. Sage gave the check to him yesterday in payment of an account."

"Yes, I see; Jones indorsed the paper and passed it over to somebody else, and it may have gone through two or three hands before it came into the possession of the man who sent it to me," Joe Phenix observed.

"I say, governor, I have changed my mind about this matter!" Tony Western announced, abruptly. "I think this thing is all right. It isn't a 'plant,' nor a trap of any kind, but some big fish wants to consult you upon some important matter, and has adopted this queer way so as to make sure that no one will be able to learn anything about the affair."

"That is the inference to be drawn from his letter," Joe Phenix replied.

"Yes, and though I, at first, jumped to the conclusion that the man wasn't honest in his statement, yet, as he has plunked up a hundred in solid cash, it ought to be good proof that he means business."

"Very true; if it was a foe who wanted to entrap me I doubt if any such sum of money would be risked, even if the man thought to lull me into security by so doing."

"Oh, no!" Tony Western exclaimed, decidedly. "It would be a big crook indeed to put up a hundred dollars just as a bait for a man with whom he wanted to get square."

"I believe that your surmise is right, and that the summons comes from some man of standing who has a business matter on hand of such great importance that he hesitates to arrange an interview with me in the regular way for fear that some one might discover that we are in consultation."

"That is my notion, governor!"

"I will keep the appointment!"

"Yes, and just remember that I predict that it will turn out to be a matter of importance!" the other declared.

This ended the conversation.

Joe Phenix read his newspaper, took a stroll down the street about noon time, got his lunch, then returned to the office and prepared to keep the appointment.

There was a large closet attached to the inner room—Phenix had two apartments—and this closet was well-stocked with a variety of disguises.

The one that the detective selected on this occasion was a plain dark suit, which showed evident marks of wear, and when he was attired in this, with a short-haired, iron-gray wig, so made as to hide two-thirds of his forehead, he presented a good representation of a country clergyman or schoolmaster, and this was heightened by a liquid dye which Joe Phenix applied to his face and hands, giving them the tan tint common to the denizens of the rural districts.

But in the side pockets of the sack coat which he wore were two articles altogether out of keeping with his peaceful aspect—a pair of revolvers of the bulldog pattern, short in barrel and carrying unusually heavy balls.

"There, I think this will do," Joe Phenix remarked after his preparations were complete.

"Oh, yes, you look like a regular hayseed. It would take a smart man to recognize that you are not a countryman. Look out that the bunco men don't pick you up!" Tony Western exclaimed with a laugh.

Joe Phenix departed by the rear door—there were two entrances to his office—descended to the street, then to Broadway and boarded an up-town car.

He timed his movements so well that he arrived at Fiftieth street at five minutes of two.

CHAPTER II.

THE MONEY KING.

JOE PHENIX stood on the northeast corner, according to the direction, a folded newspaper in his hand.

At three minutes past the hour his attention was directed to a shabby-looking hack approaching from down-town, and as it came to the cross-street the driver changed his course so as to bring the vehicle in near the curbstone.

The hackman was in keeping with the coach, a poorly-dressed old Irishman who evidently could not boast of much prosperity.

"This does not look much like the turn-out of a man of wealth and standing," the detective muttered as he noted the poverty-stricken appearance of the man and rig.

All the doubts of the detective had returned.

He changed the newspaper to his left hand, thrust the right one into the coat pocket and took a firm grip of the revolver.

Joe Phenix had determined to go on and see just what there was in this affair.

"If it is a trap intended to catch me perhaps I may be able to give the man a lesson which he will not be likely to forget for some time," he muttered, a grim smile hovering around the corners of his resolute mouth.

As the carriage approached the disguised detective was all prepared to see some benevolent-looking gentleman—some notorious crook, in an elaborate disguise, got up for the express purpose of trying a little bunco business upon him.

The hack halted by the corner.

The door opened and the face of an odd, peculiar-looking man, rather undersized in stature, appeared.

He was well along in years, fifty or thereabouts, was dressed plainly in a neat, dark business suit, had a long face, which seemed unusually so, because the chin was adorned with a pointed beard, a sandy gray in hue, the same tint as the sparse locks of hair which came out from under the derby hat. His eyes were a restless, shifting gray, deep sunken, and overhung by bristling sandy-gray eyebrows; the general appearance of the face, with its prominent nose and high cheek-bones, strangely resembled a fox.

The detective recognized the man immediately, and he relinquished his grasp upon the revolver.

"Get in, Mr. Smith, please," said the bearded gentleman, in a sharp, peculiar way, speaking like a man accustomed to command.

The detective entered the carriage, the driver chirruped to his horses, and the vehicle proceeded on up Broadway.

After the coach got in motion the foxy-looking gentleman surveyed the disguised detective for a few minutes with the greatest interest, and then abruptly exclaimed:

"Well, sir, I must compliment you upon your disguise! It is simply perfect! I know you very well by sight, as I have often seen you in Wall street, although I never had the pleasure of meeting you personally, but I never would have known you, and as the carriage drove up I had grave doubts, and if you had not held the paper in your hand I should have believed you to be a stranger."

"To be able to assume a disguise which cannot be easily penetrated is one of the first essentials of the successful detective," the man-hunter replied.

"I presume there isn't any need of introducing myself—you know who I am?"

"Oh, yes, although I never had any personal acquaintance with you, yet I have known you by sight for the last ten years."

"I suppose that I am pretty well known," the gentleman observed, with a shake of the head, as though he did not relish it. "The newspapers, both daily and illustrated, have done their best to make my face familiar to the public at large, and I have no doubt my personal appearance and my business matters, are familiar to thousands who will never meet me, and who have no possible interest in my affairs."

"Tis the penalty of greatness," the detective remarked. "The man who climbs high challenges remarks from all. As one of the foremost business men in America it is natural that people should take an interest in you. And I must say that if you were amazed at the completeness of my disguise, I was equally surprised when I saw you in a hack of this kind, for such a vehicle I would not have imagined a man like yourself would have chosen to ride in, Mr. Englebert."

The detective had spoken the name of one of the greatest money-kings of the day.

Abraham Englebert—Old Abe, as he was popularly termed in Wall street—was a man who was supposed by people, well-calculated to judge, to be worth a good twenty millions of dollars, and all this money had been acquired by his own individual efforts.

He was no Vanderbilt, nor Astor, who had millions bequeathed him by his ancestors to start on.

All that he possessed he had made personally.

A great many men spoke harshly of him. Sometimes the cry went up that he was a man who had mounted to prosperity by trampling upon his fellows less skillful, or cunning, or more scrupulous, than himself.

The loud-mouthed talkers who meet in the halls over the beer-shops and spout wildly about the tyranny of capital, and the rising of the down-trodden, toiling masses, called him a bloated monopolist, and declared that if justice was done he would ornament a lamp-post.

Still, fair-minded men were of the opinion that he was not any worse than the rest of the speculators from whose ranks he had risen, and that there wasn't one of them who would not have taken all the advantages that Old Abe was accused of taking if the opportunities came to them—or if they had been skillful enough to make the opportunities—as the gigantic speculator was accused of doing.

Philosophers, who had studied the subject, declared that it was not the man who was at fault but the system, and when the world grew older and wiser, laws would be enacted so that there could be no more Old Abes rise to kingly magnificence upon the ruins of weaker men.

Old Abe was a man merely—and no worse than the average man.

These declarations seemed to be truth, for in his private life the man's character was without a stain. He was a good husband, and a good father, and though he crushed his rivals without mercy, yet it was said that he never went out of his way to injure a man who was not trying to injure him.

"Well, I will admit that this is not exactly the kind of vehicle that I usually ride in," the money-king remarked, with a glance at the dingy interior of the hack. "But there is a method in my madness. As I wrote to you in regard to this interview, I desired above all things that it should be kept strictly secret; that is why I asked you to assume a disguise. But if I had taken you in my own carriage, which, of course, is well known to a great many people, comment would have been immediately excited, for somebody would be sure to see us; then the question would immediately arise: 'Hello, who is that man riding with Englebert? It is a stranger—what game is the old fox up to now?' for by such playful names I am sometimes called."

"Yes, no doubt that if I were noticed riding with you in your coach, it would have excited talk."

"It surely would, my dear sir, for there are plenty of men in the world who firmly believe that I lay awake nights planning and scheming how to increase my wealth, just as if I hadn't now all I could possibly take care of, and my great concern at present is how to prevent losing what I have got, not to acquire more. People would believe, if they heard that I was riding with and conversing on familiar terms with a stranger, that I had some scheme on hand, and there are certain parties so anxious to learn what I am about, that they would leave no stone unturned, not only to discover who the stranger was, but also to find out what the motive of his business with me."

"You are correct in your assumption, no doubt."

"Now the main thing about this matter is to keep our interview a profound secret. Not a soul must have the slightest suspicion that I have placed myself in communication with you, for if the fact leaked out my object would be defeated."

"In all detective matter to keep the affair perfectly quiet is of the first importance," Joe Phenix declared.

"Yes, I fully understand it, and have acted on that idea in this instance."

"I did not sign my name to the note to you, and even took the trouble to send you a check which came into my office in the course of business, so that while you would be assured that the sender of the note was in earnest, yet it would not be possible for you even to guess who it was that wrote."

"That is true; if I had been given twenty guesses I do not think I would have named you in any one of them."

"I have been a successful man, and think one of the principal reasons why I have been successful is that I have always made it a rule to do anything I had to do as well as I could possibly do it. I never, knowingly, shirked any work, no matter what it was."

"That is undoubtedly one of the best rules that a man can follow."

"Well, in this case I have taken all possible pains," the money-king explained. "I went to lunch about twelve. After lunch got into my carriage and was driven to one of the office buildings near the City Hall; told the coachman to wait for me until I came out. This building has two doors, as it is on a corner. I went in one door and came out through the other, jumped on a car and rode up to Chatham square, where I made a bargain with this hackman to drive me to Bloomingdale, and arranged to pick you up as we came along. Now, although I could not hope to show myself in the money district without being recognized, yet in Chatham Square no one appeared to know me, and I believe I have succeeded in getting thus far without a soul suspecting who I am."

"The East side knows but little of the money center and its men," Joe Phenix observed.

"So I calculated. The point with me was to secure an interview with you, and have the matter so arranged that we could speak with perfect freedom, and without danger of any one knowing that we have been in consultation."

"Well, it seems to me that all the conditions are fulfilled," the detective replied. "Most certainly we can speak freely here. The man on the horse could not overhear our conversation if he desired to listen. On the Boulevard you are not likely to meet any one who knows you, and by leaning back you can keep out of sight, so there is little danger of your being recognized."

"And now for business!" Englebert exclaimed.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE STORY.

"As one of the wealthy men of New York, I am, naturally, selected for a victim by all sorts of people, who try to get at my money by various schemes," the millionaire exclaimed.

"Twenty or thirty begging letters reach me in every mail, ranging from the church people in some country town who ask, unblushingly, for a check, for a thousand or more of dollars, to help them along, to the needy man or woman who craves a little assistance to keep them out of the poor-house."

"That is the common experience of all men of wealth."

"Then, there are the inventors, with all sorts of wonderful things, who only need a little aid from me to put them on the high road to fortune. I do not doubt that there might be one or two out of a hundred who really have good things, which would pay me well to go into, but it is out of my line, and I have no time to examine into the merits of the inventions; then, lastly come the swindlers, the adventurers, the cavaliers of fortune, who think that they are smart enough to either cajole or frighten me out of some money."

"That is the penalty a man pays for being successful," the detective observed with a smile.

"I understand that, of course, and, as a rule, I am not at all worried by these applications. The letters I do not see, for I have a secretary who attends to my mail, and does not allow any of these epistles to reach me, and if the parties try to secure a personal interview they find they have to submit to a cross-examination before they can get at me, and not over one in a thousand succeeds in fooling the vigilant guard who keeps watch over me."

"Necessary precautions!"

"Yes, and I flattered myself that I had the matter so well arranged that it was not possible for me to be annoyed, but for the last month I have been the victim of a letter-writer who manages to reach me with his notes despite of all my precautions."

"Now your recital is beginning to become interesting," the detective observed.

"The first letter came just about a month ago."

"After dinner I went to my library and picked up one of the evening newspapers from the file on the table, where they are always placed for my inspection."

"As I unfolded the paper a letter dropped into my lap; I had drawn a rocking-chair up to the table and sat down in it."

"The letter was merely a sheet of note-paper folded, and was without an envelope."

"Thinking that it was some circular which had been folded in with the newspaper, as is often done, I opened it. You can judge of my surprise when I found that it was a letter addressed to me, and of course, under these peculiar circumstances it was natural for me to read it."

"Very natural," Joe Phenix remarked.

"It ran about in this way:

"Abraham Englebert, you have millions of dollars and I have not hundreds. Do you think that this is right? I do not. If you are a just man, and as wise as you are skillful, you will see that you ought to give me some of your millions. About fifty thousand dollars, I think, would satisfy me. If you care to make any arrangement, put a personal in this paper to-morrow addressed to Rex. All you need to say is 'Rex, I think it will be wise for me to do so.'"

"A covert threat!" the detective exclaimed.

"Yes, I took it to be that."

"You paid no attention to it, of course?"

"Certainly not! All I did was to laugh at the cunning displayed by the rascal in getting his letter before me."

"It could be easily done by either getting the man who delivered the papers to put it in one of them, or else by collusion with some of the servants in the house," the detective declared.

"I threw the missive into the fire and dismissed it from my mind."

"Two nights after, sitting in the library with my wife, she opened a magazine, which had just come by mail, and a folded note fluttered out."

"Immediately I guessed that it was another communication from Rex."

"My wife opened the note, read it, then handed it to me, saying 'What does this mean?' The note was in the same handwriting as the other, a firm, legible back-hand, evidently adopted as a disguise, and all it contained was a single line, 'Old Abe, you will be sorry if you don't see Rex.'"

"Brief and to the point!" Joe Phenix commented.

"Yes, I did not want to alarm my wife, so I passed it off as a joke, saying that probably some of the young brokers of the Stock Exchange were endeavoring to have some fun at my expense."

"She was deceived by my manner, and contented herself with the remark that she did not see any fun in such jokes."

"By this time I had made up my mind that it was necessary for me to take some action in the matter so I preserved the note, intending if I

heard any more from Rex to put the matter into the hands of the police."

"Three days passed and then I got another message which created a deal of commotion in my household."

"My wife and I had gone to our room, my son and daughter came in for a moment to say good-night, and I was talking to them, when a cry of alarm came from my wife."

"She had turned down the bedclothes from the pillows and to one of them a folded note was fastened by means of a miniature dagger about two inches long."

"The note said: 'Beware! See Rex or die!'"

"Extremely melo-dramatic!" said the detective, with a smile.

"I laughed at the idea; my son became enraged at the audacity of the rascal, but my wife and daughter were seriously alarmed. It seemed terrible to them that any one should be able to penetrate to my very bed-chamber and leave such a message."

"Some of the servants of your household are in league with the man," Joe Phenix remarked.

"That was the conclusion to which I came immediately, and I thought that it was high time that I tried to see if a little salt could not be put on the tail of this bold bird, so I called upon the chief of police and laid the matter before him."

"He is a good man; none better in the country, an old and experienced officer," the detective announced.

"The chief made light of the matter, and said that it was an old game. Like you, he was satisfied that some one in the house was aiding the rascal, and at least had no doubt he could succeed in trapping the parties."

"So, by his direction, I inserted a personal to Rex asking how I could communicate with him."

"The advertisement appeared that evening, and the next morning when I got up I found a note pinned to the very head-board of my bed; the sheet was not folded this time, but placed so it would catch my eyes the moment I arose."

"This note told me that I might employ all the detectives in the country, and I would not succeed in catching any one, and wound up by saying that I would soon discover I would have to choose between losing fifty thousand dollars or my life."

"The fellow was certainly playing an extremely bold game," the detective commented. "In fact, I don't think that I ever heard of a much bolder one."

"That is exactly what the chief of police declared when I reported the matter to him," the millionaire replied. "My door, mind you, was locked and bolted. The letter was affixed to the head-board at some time during the night while I slept, which plainly showed that the man who placed it there must have been able to gain access to my room despite the fact that the door was securely fastened."

"A smart hotel thief is not troubled much by ordinary locks and bolts," Joe Phenix remarked.

"So the chief said, but he took such an interest in the case that he came in person with a couple of his keenest detectives to examine into the matter."

"As he explained to me he regarded the boast of the mysterious scoundrel in the light of a personal challenge to him, and he was going to try if he could not convince Master Rex that he was not so smart as he imagined."

"A very natural feeling."

"But after the detectives made a thorough examination of my room they declared they were puzzled, to guess how the man gained admittance in the dead hours of the night. The lock could have been opened by means of a false key, but as there wasn't any transom over the door, nor any signs that a hole had been bored, and the key-hole was so situated that it would be almost impossible for any one to reach the bolt by poking a wire through it—the usual way a hotel thief gets at the bolts, as the chief told me—it was a mystery to them how the entrance had been accomplished."

"If the affair puzzled the chief it showed that the man was a master of his profession."

"The detectives agreed on one thing though, and that was, that some of the inmates of the house were concerned in the affair."

"No doubt about that!" Joe Phenix declared in a tone of conviction.

"So the chief proceeded to have each and every servant in the house shadowed, and in order to carry out this scheme in the most complete manner he introduced a couple of detectives into the house, a man and woman. I keep eight or ten servants so it was an easy matter to find some pretense for engaging a couple more."

"The chief was working on the old lines," Joe Phenix observed in his quiet way. "Such a proceeding is usually successful where the game is a common, every-day rascal, but with such a man as I take this Rex to be, I should not suppose it would work."

"It did not, sir!" Englebert exclaimed. "And the third day after the detectives entered the house, as I took down my hat in the hall, a letter dropped out, written by the rascal, in which he fairly laughed at the precautions which had been taken—and he gave a full account too of all that had been done, spoke of the two detectives in the

house in the disguise of servants, and said at the close that he would give me one month to find out how foolish the attempt was to discover him by employing a lot of dull-witted bloodhounds."

"Rather sarcastic," Joe Phenix remarked. Still, his being able to tell you just exactly how you were playing the game showed that he had a decided advantage over the men who were trying to catch him."

"When I showed the letter to the chief of police it made him angry, and he swore he would not leave any stone unturned to catch the rascal."

"Two weeks have gone by and the detectives have not succeeded in getting the slightest clew, but every third or fourth day I get a letter from the scoundrel, all of them coming to me in the most mysterious manner; the writer jeered at the detective's want of success, and in the last he asked me how many years did I suppose it would be before the officers succeeded in getting a clew."

"Now, I will frankly admit, Mr. Phenix, that I am getting a little alarmed!" the money-king declared. "I begin to believe that this mysterious individual could do me a mortal injury if he felt disposed, and I made up my mind that as the chief of police and his detectives seemed unable to do anything I would seek for other aid."

"Your name occurred to me—your reputation as an expert man-catcher is great, and so I resolved to put myself in communication with you, and to arrange the affair in such a way that it would not be possible for any one to know that I had consulted you."

"I have succeeded in getting the best of some pretty smart men in my time and I did not relish the idea of being beaten by this mysterious, unknown scoundrel."

CHAPTER IV.

A NOVEL SCHEME.

"You have acted wisely, Mr. Englebert," Joe Phenix remarked. "And if you have not succeeded in this instance, in baffling this party, who designs to make you a prey, then he must be more than man."

"This is my idea. I have not spoken of making an arrangement with you to a single soul!" the money-king declared. "But before I applied to the chief of police I discussed the matter with my family, and although none of the servants were present, yet as we did not use any particular precaution against eavesdroppers it is probable that the conversation was overheard."

"Oh, yes, hardly a doubt in regard to that, and as the parties were thus put upon their guard—I assume that there is a couple or more in your household, who are concerned in this plot—they were able to detect the police spies when they came disguised as servants."

"That is the explanation the chief of police gave in regard to the matter."

"Well, didn't the detectives succeed in finding anybody in the house against whom suspicion might be directed?" Joe Phenix asked, thoughtfully.

"No; the men did their best, the chief said, but were not able to hit upon a clew."

"You pay me quite a compliment by thinking I can do better than the regular detectives," the man-hunter remarked with a quiet smile.

"Well, the trouble with them is that they have been hampered from the start!" Englebert declared. "I agree with you that there is probably more than one in this scheme, and, in fact, I have come to the belief that there is a regular gang at the bottom of the matter, and as they possess the advantage of knowing the detectives, while the detectives do not know them, it is not possible for the spies to get any clews."

"I see your idea; I will have the advantage of starting in without the scamps suspecting that I have taken a hand in the game."

"Exactly! And now, Mr. Phenix, let me explain to you my ideas about this matter: I am a man who, as a rule, decides what action to take in any matter that may arise without consulting with any one, but when this affair occurred, as it was something entirely novel to me I thought best to consult the chief of police, but as it appears that schemers are too much for the regular men, some other plan must be tried."

"I put on my thinking cap, so to speak, and went to work to study the thing out just as if it was a puzzle which had occurred to me in the regular course of business."

"The conclusion to which I came was that this attempt to get fifty thousand dollars of my money was not a common-place scheme, got up by every-day rascals, but that some men of more than ordinary ability had banded themselves together, and that the only way to defeat their plans was for me to organize a band, who would be equally as secret in working as this criminal league."

"The idea is a good one," Joe Phenix observed, with an approving nod of his massive head.

"It is fighting fire with fire!" the money-king declared.

"The failure of the regular detectives, although I presume they are as skillful man-hunters as can be found anywhere, satisfies me that some extraordinary means must be adopted if I desire to checkmate the ingenious rascals; the idea of the secret band came to me, a sort of silent body-guard, ever on the watch—ever

ready to defend me from danger, and yet acting in such a way that no one will suspect it has been all arranged beforehand, that their principal business is to protect me."

"It is an ingenious scheme, and if it is properly carried out I have no doubt it will succeed, not only in beating the game of the men who are striking at you from the dark, but in bringing them to justice."

"That is my calculation. I am satisfied that the ordinary detectives in this case will not be able to do anything, but I believe a man like yourself, Mr. Phenix, with your vast experience and the knowledge of human nature that you must possess, would be able to find six agents, men and women, as your judgment dictates, who could be depended upon to carry out any orders given them by you."

"I think the scheme can be carried out," the detective observed. "And if I use proper care in selecting the parties I do not doubt I can get six agents who will do splendid work."

"That is my idea!" exclaimed the millionaire, rubbing his hands briskly together. I have a suspicion, you know, that these regular bloodhounds get into ruts, just the same as men do in other lines, and so fail to do as good work as they might."

"I do not doubt that there is a great deal of truth in the supposition," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Your secret and silent six will be as fresh people, not hampered by any old-time ideas as to how the work must be done, and they should be able to accomplish important results."

"The main advantage which they will possess is that they will work in the dark, and so be covered by the mantle of secrecy."

"By the way, have any of these mysterious letters ever come to your office down-town?" the detective asked.

"No, not one."

"You received them all at your residence, then?"

"Yes."

"From that one would be apt to conclude that no one in your office had anything to do with the matter."

"Yes, that was what the detectives said."

"Are any of the inmates of your mansion also at the office?"

"Yes, my son, his valet, who being a handy fellow and a man of considerable education also serves as a confidential man of business, and my secretary, Mr. Somerdyke."

"These persons, being above suspicion, I suppose the detectives did not trouble their heads about," Joe Phenix, observed, carelessly.

"Oh, yes, they did!" the money-king exclaimed. "For the chief of police suggested at the beginning that somebody like Somerdyke, or my son's valet, men who would not be apt to be suspected, might be concerned in the affair, and asked if I wanted to really get at the heart of the mystery, no matter who was hurt by the investigation, and I replied that I certainly did. I said to him, if it is my own son who is at the bottom of this villainous thing I want him discovered and punished."

"That was plain enough."

"Yes, and on that basis they went into the matter. Every soul in my house was shadowed. In fact I have an idea that neither my wife nor daughter were exempt."

"And the shadowing was fruitless of results?"

"Yes, not a single suspicious thing was discovered by the shadowers in connection with any of the people who dwelt beneath my roof."

"Well, under the circumstances, that was not strange," the detective remarked. "It is plain from the letters which you received that the members of the gang knew the bloodhounds had been placed upon the track, and it would be a very strange fact indeed if they did not take care to be upon their guard so that it would not be possible for them to be caught."

"Yes, that is true, and that is, probably, the reason why the detectives failed."

"But your agents, working in secret, ought to be able to do better."

"I think they will."

"Now, while we have been conversing, the outline of a plan has come into my mind," Joe Phenix continued, after pausing for a few moments.

"It will not be an easy thing for me to get just the kind of agents I require for a scheme of this kind, but they are in existence and can be got, only it will take time."

"The question of expense, you know, does not enter into this calculation at all!" the money-king declared. "You are free to go ahead, no matter how great the cost! I am fighting for fifty thousand dollars, and I would rather spend a hundred thousand than allow these rascals to have the satisfaction of triumphing over me. I am not afraid to speak so plainly to a man like yourself, Mr. Phenix, for I know you can be trusted."

The detective bowed at the compliment.

"I feel sure, sir, that no matter whether I succeed or fail in this enterprise, you will not have cause to regret your confidence," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Now, the agents I want can be got, but, as I said, it will take some time to find them; I shall

not wait though until I secure the whole six before I commence operations."

"Certainly not! As soon as you engage the first one let him, or her, as the case may be, begin, and the sooner the better!"

"Another point. I must arrange matters so that some of the agents can enter your service and I may desire to have one or two of them in your office."

"I will do exactly as you say about the matter, so form your plans freely, and rely upon it that I will aid you to the best of my ability."

"These agents must enter your service in such a natural manner that no one will be able to guess that they are not what they appear to be."

"Of course! otherwise they will not be able to be of any service."

"You see the *Morning Bazoo*?"

"Yes."

"In future look in the personal column each morning, and whenever you see an advertisement which reads, 'I am ready!' direct a letter to the address which follows, and ask the question, 'What can you do?' Give your address in such a way that the answer will be sure to come to you without being seen by anybody else."

"Yes, I understand. I can arrange that matter easily enough."

"Then, when the answer reaches you, and in it the writer will state what he can do, you must make a place for that party, but be careful to do it in such a natural manner that no one will suspect that there is anything out of the way about the proceeding."

"Yes, yes, I see."

"Perhaps on some occasion it will be as well to advertise for a party, so as to divert suspicion. When the applicants come you will know the right one from the frequent use of the words 'I am ready.'"

"I understand, and, so far, I must say the scheme seems to be an excellent one."

"I think it would be well, too, that you do not speak to the spies in regard to their work, but treat them exactly as though you had no suspicion that they are anything but what they pretend to be."

"That is a good idea, I think," the millionaire observed, after reflecting upon the matter for a moment. "I might address the secret agent in a familiar manner at some time when I imagined there was no one near, and yet there might be a spy on the watch."

"That is exactly what I want to guard against," the detective remarked.

"You fully comprehend that there isn't any question of expense in this matter," Englebert observed. "You are to go ahead, regardless of the cost. I will have five thousand dollars placed to your credit in the First National Bank; you are at liberty to draw on it as freely as you like, and if that is not enough I will make it ten thousand."

"I think the five will be ample."

"It is not a question with me of money, but it now has become a personal matter," the money-king declared. "If a gang of mysterious, unknown scoundrels can bulldoze a man of my standing with impunity, then the times, indeed, are out of joint?"

"I think I can trap them," Joe Phenix said, in his quiet way.

Then the pair arranged a method by means of which they could secretly communicate with each other, and as the carriage had arrived at the Bloomingdale Hospital, the pair got out. The millionaire paid the driver and he departed.

CHAPTER V.

THE BUNCO MEN.

THE money-king and the detective walked up the Boulevard until the hack disappeared in the distance.

"Here comes an omnibus!" Englebert exclaimed. "I will take that down-town, and you can go in the next. I think we have managed this matter so that it will be impossible for any one to know that there has been a meeting between us."

"No doubt about that, and if we are as successful in the rest of the scheme, we will trap our birds."

Then the two parted, Joe Phenix kept on up the Boulevard, while the money-king halted to await the approach of the omnibus.

After Englebert departed the detective came to the conclusion that he would go through one of the cross streets, and take the Elevated Road, as he could save time by so doing.

This course he pursued, and soon was on his way down-town.

During the ride he meditated upon the situation.

"Six good people," he murmured, "and they must be extra good to do the work. I know a dozen spies, and stool-pigeons, but there is hardly one of them that would fill the bill in a case like this, for I need fresh tools who have not been used to the business."

"Englebert is right, I think, in believing that there is a regularly organized band, and if I get some of my agents into his house and office, there is a chance that the gang, not suspecting that they are spies, may make a proposition to

some of them to join the band, and so give me a clew.

"Because none of the letters have come to the office, the inference is drawn that no one there has anything to do with the matter; but is it correct to look at it in that light?"

"Is it not more likely that the letters were only sent to the house so that no suspicion might be directed to the men in the office?"

"That seems to me more probable than the other surmise, and on that theory I will work."

"The main thing is to secure the proper agents, and I do not doubt I shall have trouble about that, but I will be able to accomplish it in time."

The detective had some people in his mind all of whom he thought would make good agents, but he was not sure that he could place his hand on them immediately.

Joe Phenix got off at the Cortlandt Street Station, and as he descended to the street the attention of two young men, who were standing in a doorway, was attracted to him.

"There goes a jay!" exclaimed the taller one of the two; both were well-dressed, and looked like young men of good standing. "I think we can pick him up," he continued. "Go for him, Ike!"

The second young man, who looked as though he was of German descent, with his light hair and blue eyes, crossed the street, hurried up toward Broadway, then crossed again and came down so as to meet the disguised detective.

As soon as he approached near enough he made a dart forward with extended hand.

"Why, is it possible, Mr. Smith, when did you come to town?" And then, before Joe Phenix could say anything, the young man grasped him by the hand and shook it in the warmest manner.

"How did you leave all the folks at home? Well, really, you are about the last man I expected to see!" the young man continued.

The warning of his assistant, Tony Western, to beware of the bunco men, at once came to the mind of the detective.

With all his experience in New York this was the first time that he had ever encountered the ingenious swindlers known as bunco men, and he took it as a great compliment that he had been able to disguise himself so thoroughly as to lead the sharp-eyed rascals to believe they could make a prey of him.

And, just for the joke of the thing, he made up his mind to let the fellows go on so as to see what they would do.

"You have made a mistake, my young friend," he remarked, acting the character of the simple countryman to the life. "My name isn't Smith."

"Is it possible? Well, I declare! I would have picked you out from among a hundred as my old friend, Smith. How may I call your name?" the young man asked, in an innocent way, and affecting to be much puzzled.

"My name is Horton. James Horton, and I am from Gloversville, New York," the disguised detective replied, giving the first name and town that came into his head.

"Ah, yes; well, I see now that I have made a mistake, and you must excuse me!" Then the young man bowed in the politest manner and passed on.

Phenix proceeded slowly up the street.

The young man who had accosted him joined the other in the doorway.

"James Horton, Gloversville, New York!" he exclaimed, rapidly.

The tall, slender fellow drew a small bound book from his pocket.

It was a reference book for the use of business men and contained a list of banks, their principal offices, and the legal firms of the various towns in the United States.

Quickly he turned the pages until he came to Gloversville.

"First National, George W. Clark, and Torry and Torry. That will do!" he exclaimed.

Then, shoving the book into his pocket he tried the same game that the other had pursued. He hurried across the street and went up toward Broadway, and as Joe Phenix was crossing the street when the tall young man arrived at the corner he met him face to face.

"Why, Mr. Horton, how do you do?" he exclaimed, grasping the hand of the supposed countryman with as much enthusiasm as though he was a long-lost brother. "How did you leave all the folks in Gloversville? Well, I declare, I am delighted to see you! You remember me, of course. I haven't forgotten your face although it is some time since I was in your town. I am Clark's cousin, you know. George W., of the First National. Lordy! how I would like to take another trip up to Gloversville. The folks there treated me so well that I thought I owned the town, particularly the Torrys—the lawyers, you know, I hope that they are all well. I don't think that I ever met a finer lot of men in my life, and I am so glad that I happened to encounter you, for now I will be able to show you that the New York boys know how to treat friends when we meet them. You must come right along with me and make my place your headquarters, while you are in town. My name is William—William W. Clark, named

after my cousin, George W., a fancy of my mother's, you know; I reckon the old lady thought I might come in for a little of his cash one of these days, but I don't think there is much chance of that, eh? not that I need the money, you know, for I am in the wholesale dry-goods business—got a splendid situation with Claffin & Co.—you have heard of the firm, of course, one of the biggest jobbers in the country, but I tell you what it is, Mr. Horton, I am just delighted to see you!" And again the tall young man shook the hand of the disguised detective.

Joe Phenix, when he listened to this speech, so adroitly made and fluently delivered, was not sorry that he had gone into this adventure, for it was plain that this bunco man was an extra good one, and he did not wonder that the dull-witted countrymen are caught, for the affair is managed with exceeding skill.

Alone, amid the never-ending noise and bustle of the great city, the rustic feels like a fish out of water, for there is no loneliness in the world like that which seizes upon a man, alone in a great city, without a soul that he knows to whom he can speak.

The hurrying crowd, strangers all, few of whom even take the trouble to cast a glance at him, the most of them rushing along as though their lives depended upon their getting to a certain point in a certain time; it is so different from his home, where he knows almost everybody, and where it is the custom even for strangers to nod in a friendly manner to each other as they pass.

The solitude of the wilderness does not strike that terror to the soul that is felt by the stranger alone amid the crowds of a metropolis.

Under such conditions it is not strange then that when the countryman is accosted by a well-dressed, affable stranger who greets him like a brother, and mentions the familiar names of the big men of his town that the man makes the mistake of supposing that the agreeable gentleman is exactly what he represents himself to be?

True, he cannot exactly recall the circumstances under which he met him at home, still, he must have done so, or how would the stranger be so pat with his name?

The countryman almost always forgets that he gave his name and address to another stranger only a few minutes before.

Joe Phenix, being an artist himself, in his peculiar line, was quick to appreciate a master-hand, and such this bunco man certainly was, and so he humored the fellow, just for the purpose of leading him on, for he was as anxious to watch the development of this little game as the average first-nighter is to see the display of acting upon the mimic stage.

Therefore he shook hands with the tall young man, said he was delighted to meet him, although it was entirely unexpected; explained in a very candid manner that his memory was a little hazy about meeting him, but "reckoned" that it was all right, anyway.

"Certainly, of course; going up the street? I am bound up Broadway myself," the bunco man remarked.

"Yes; taking in the sights, you know."

"You must let me show you around," the other declared as the two proceeded up the street. "You will not find a man in New York who knows the ropes any better than I do."

The disguised detective replied that he would be glad of a pilot, and he did not doubt that his friend knew the city like a book.

"Oh, yes, I was born and brought up here—lived in New York all my life you know, and if any friends want to see the elephant, I think I will be able to show them the animal in all its glory."

"And that reminds me that I have an appointment," he exclaimed, abruptly, pulling out his watch as he spoke.

"Yes, I have just time to get there," he continued. "It is over on the east side of town. We are going to change our cartman; the man we have does not give satisfaction, and the firm asked me to see about another man, and I am going to meet him. It will only take us a short distance out of our way."

"Oh, that is all right, I am in no hurry," Joe Phenix observed, speaking just as a good-natured, easy-going countryman would speak.

Then the bunco man guided the disguised detective across City Hall Park and up Park Row until he came to what used to be known as Chatham street, but now transformed into Park Row, a locality where Jew shops, five-cent restaurants and small saloons abound.

"There is the number on the other side of the street, and it is a saloon too," then the young man shook his head as though he did not like it. "I remember now, he said his brother kept a saloon; and, in fact, about all of these cartmen hang out in some saloon. It will not do us any harm to go in, we need not drink anything. I am not in the habit of drinking, you know, although I take a glass of ale when I feel thirsty sometimes."

"A glass of beer won't hurt any one," the supposed countryman remarked.

"Yes, I agree with you!" the bunco man exclaimed, his face lighting up for he felt sure he had hooked his fish. "Come in and I will stand treat!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE GAME.

THE saloon was a dingy-looking little place, with a small bar in the front, and a couple of tables, with chairs around them, at the back, and in the rear wall was a small door.

There were some men drinking at the counter as the pair entered, and at one of the tables at the extreme end of the saloon, sat a well-dressed, stoutly-built man reading a newspaper.

"There is my man now, I think," the bunco sharp observed. "Come on, and we will sit down so we can drink our beer comfortably."

"All right," replied the detective, fully prepared to agree to almost anything so that the game could go on.

The pair proceeded to the table, and as they came up, the man seated there raised his eyes to survey the new-comers.

"Why, Mr. Johnson, is that you?" Mr. Clark exclaimed, and then he shook hands with the other in the warmest manner.

"This is not the party I expect to see, but an old friend of mine whom I haven't met for some time," he explained, and then, with a deal of ceremony, he proceeded to introduce the man from Gloversville to the other.

This was followed by a call for "three beers!" and the new-comers took seats at the table.

"Lemme see!" exclaimed the bunco chief in a reflective way, "the last time I met your royal highness you were the head clerk at the Fifth Avenue Hotel."

"Yes, but I am not there now; I found that the confinement did not agree with me, I needed a more active life," the other said, acting his part in a really splendid manner.

"Ah, yes, I see," exclaimed Clark, in a sympathizing way. "Well, what are you driving at now?"

"Oh, I am in on a big speculation!" the man exclaimed. "Got right in on the ground floor too. I'm the secretary of the Florida Orange Grove Land Improvement Company!"

And it was with a great flourish he made the announcement.

"Yes, yes, I know all about that colossal speculation!" the bunco sharp declared. "I have an interest in it too. Got one of the tickets in my pocket right now!" and as he spoke he took from his pocketbook a printed slip of paper about the size of a bank bill.

It was nicely gotten up, and the disguised detective, glancing at it as the other laid the paper upon the table, saw that it entitled the holder to ten of the company's ten-acre orange grove farms, valued at two hundred dollars apiece.

"You are in for a good thing!" Mr. Johnson announced. "The ten acres tract, with an orange grove upon it in full bearing, is richly worth a thousand dollars of any man's money!" he continued. "And then there is a chance of your catching a premium too. To-day the drawing takes place, and that is what I am waiting here for. Our office is right on the next street, you know; you go through this back door, and through the little alley, and you will find yourself in the rear of our office."

"Ah, yes, I see, but I didn't know that before, although I knew the office was around the block."

"Yes, I am waiting for the drawing now. This is the big day, you know," Mr. Johnson remarked. "There are ten sections to be drawn to-day. Let's see, you are in number one," he added, with a glance at the certificate.

"Yes, but you can just bet that I am going in on every section!" the bunco chief declared.

"That is where your head is level! I am in from number one to ten!" the other exclaimed.

"This is one of the biggest schemes that has ever been run," Mr. Clark explained to the disguised detective. "You see, this company is going to work on a great scale. They want to get their property into the market as soon as possible and so they are offering extra inducements."

"These certificates cost a dollar apiece, and after a hundred of them are sold the company has a drawing and every tenth number that comes out is entitled to a premium of a hundred dollars and a ten-acre farm, and the men who get left are entitled to take their ten acres by paying ten dollars within a year. You understand the whole idea is to create a rush for the shares so as to get people to settle down there as soon as possible."

"The company only sell half their land in this way, you know," Mr. Johnson took upon himself to explain. "Then, when they get the town started they will put the price up to a hundred dollars an acre, a thousand dollars for a ten-acre farm and that is where they will make their money."

"Yes, I see," Joe Phenix remarked; he could not help admiring the shrewdness with which this trap to catch "suckers" had been prepared.

"Perhaps you would like to take a chance, Mr. Horton," the bunco sharp suggested. "It will only cost you a dollar and you may draw a premium which will be a hundred dollars in your pocket; anyway, you will be ex-

titled to take ten of the orange grove farms, but you have a year to make up your mind."

"Yes, it seems like a good scheme," Joe Phenix remarked.

He was anxious for the play to go on, for as yet he did not see where the bunco men were going to come in.

A single dollar would be poor pay for all this trouble.

"Have you a certificate, Mr. Johnson?" the bunco chief inquired.

"Yes; just by the luckiest chance in the world!" the other answered. And then he produced the certificate.

Joe Phenix was in the habit of carrying some loose change in his vest pocket, and he happened to have a little over a dollar, so he was able to secure the "valuable" certificate.

Then Mr. Johnson glanced at the clock on the wall, and announced that the time for the drawing was at hand.

"I will be back in about ten minutes, and let you know the result!" he exclaimed, as he departed through the rear door.

After he was gone the bunco sharp ordered the beer-glasses to be refilled, and proceeded to explain what a big thing this Florida land speculation was.

In much less than ten minutes the other bunco man was back, and his face was illuminated with joy as he approached and resumed his seat at the table.

"I wish I may die!" he exclaimed, "if I don't believe that both of you gentlemen were born under a lucky star!"

"You don't mean to say that we have both hit it?" Mr. Clark exclaimed.

"Hang me if you haven't!" for a hundred apiece, too, and I have got the ducats!" Mr. Johnson declared, then took a roll of bills from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Clark.

This gentleman ran the bills over rapidly, flipping them apart with the ease of a bank cashier.

"Twenty fives—a hundred dollars! that is right; and Johnson, old fellow, I am ever so much obliged to you! But, I say, where is Mr. Horton's money? Didn't you bring it?"

"Yes, I got it all right, but as Mr. Horton is a stranger, the president says that he will have to require him to show that he would be able to pay for ten of the lots called for by the certificates; that is, that he is good for a hundred dollars. As soon as he shows the money, I have orders to pay him his premium. It is just a mere form, you know, as a guarantee of good faith, so as to keep irresponsible men from getting into the company."

"Oh, that is all right! I will guarantee that Mr. Horton is good for a thousand!" the bunco chief exclaimed.

"Oh, I haven't any doubt about that!" the other declared. "It is only a mere form, but the president is very strict, and I have to go by his orders, you know. Just as soon as Mr. Horton shows the money I can pay over the hundred."

"If you are a little short, Mr. Horton, put up what money you have, and I will help you out!" the bunco chief declared, with a flourish.

Joe Phenix saw the game now. This was all a desire to get the countryman to produce his money, and the moment it was displayed one of the fellows would snatch it and run through the back-door.

As it happened the detective only had a few dollars in his pocketbook, and he made up his mind to bring it forth, thinking that as he was prepared for any trick, it would be a hard matter for the rascals to get the best of him, so he remarked:

"Oh, I reckon I can put up a hundred without any trouble," and as he spoke he dove his hand into his pocket.

CHAPTER VII. HERRING BOB.

A LOOK of eager interest was on the faces of the sharpers, and a gleam of exultation in their eyes, but just as they fancied that success was about to crown their efforts, there came a sudden and entirely unexpected interruption.

A medium-sized, but muscularly-built young man, dressed rather roughly, and bearing the unmistakable look of a Bowery boy, had been drinking a glass of beer at the end of the counter, and while apparently not paying any attention to the men at the table, yet, in reality, he had listened to the conversation, and when the disguised detective put his hand into his pocket the stranger thought that it was time for him to interfere.

"Say, old man, don't pull out your leather, for there's a cove right behind your chair ready to swipe it the moment you do, and he will give you the sneak out so quick that it will make your head swim, see?"

This speech acted upon the bunco men like the explosion of a bomb-shell, particularly as Joe Phenix drew his hand quickly from his pocket, and glancing behind him saw that there was indeed a man leaning over the back of his chair, apparently all ready to grab the pocketbook and run when it should be produced.

The sharper understood that their little game was spoiled and their rage was great.

The man who had sneaked behind the chair, a

good-sized fellow, with an evil-looking face, was the first to take action.

"You blasted dog! how dare you call me a thief?" he cried in unmistakable English accents, and he made a rush at the stranger, but that worthy was on his guard for an attack and received the Englishman with a straight right-hander on the jaw which knocked him back on the table, all in a heap, and then he rolled to the floor.

The other two were quick to come to the assistance of their pal, but the stranger seemed to be all arms and he knocked them right and left with as much ease as though they had been a pair of schoolboys instead of powerful, fully-developed men.

The one lick that the first man got had taken all the fight out of him, and when he saw his comrades handled in such an unceremonious way he made haste to retreat by means of the rear door.

The other two quickly followed his example; each man had been knocked down twice, and neither one of them was able to land a blow on the skillful stranger, who either dodged or parried their strokes with the greatest ease.

Just as the men retreated, the bartender came to their assistance with a revolver, which he had pulled out from under the counter, but the stranger was equal to the situation.

He seized a bottle from behind the bar—he was right at the end of it—and faced the bartender and his weapon without flinching.

"Johnny, you don't want to pull no gun on me!" he cried, drawing back his arm, the hand of which grasped the heavy bottle by the neck, in an extremely threatening way. "You can't get but one crack at me before I am onto you like a pile of bricks, and if that one shot don't stop me right in my tracks—and it is a thousand to one that it won't—I'll fit you for a pine box afore you kin say Jack Robinson!"

The bartender halted; despite the fact that he was armed with a deadly weapon, and the other man not, he hesitated to bring on a fight.

There was something in the eyes of the other that cowed him.

Besides, the bunco gang had fled, having evidently got all of the stranger that they wanted.

The agile and stalwart Bowery boy saw that he had secured an advantage, and he was quick to improve it.

"Put your gun right away now, Johnny, and be quick about it too, 'cos I ain't anxious to put a dead tumbler-juggler on my list, but I will have to come the bottle act on you if you try any ugly business!"

The bartender was both angry and disgusted at the way the stranger had handled the bunco men, for he would have "stood in to win a stake" if the sharpers had succeeded in fleecing the supposed countryman, but as the stranger had proved himself to be a mighty warrior he was unwilling to test his metal.

"Oh, that is all right!" he exclaimed, but in a way that showed he did not relish the stranger's interference. "I ain't got no call to interfere if some of the boys want to have a little quiet scrap, but if you are going in for to clean out der place, I've got for to try and put a stop to it, see!"

"Oh, you're a gen'leman; anybody kin see that!" the stranger observed, in a rather sarcastic way.

Then he turned to the disguised detective. "I say, boss, if you are going down the street I will walk along wid yer a ways."

Joe Phenix understood that this was the stranger's polite manner of saying that he had better get out, so he rose to his feet and announced that he would be glad of the other's company.

The two then left the saloon, followed by the angry glances of the bartender.

The stranger noticed the looks of the saloon man, and spoke about it with a laugh to his companion as he walked down the street.

"That tumbler juggler in there don't take his medicine for a cent!" he declared. "You see, if them cusses had got away wid yer leather—that's yer wallet and money, you know, that beer-jerker would have come in for five or ten cases, mebbe. Cases are dollars, you see!"

"Yes, I understand. He was in with the fellows then?"

"Yes, you bet! It is a tough old dive!" the other declared. "I never happened to go in there before, but I know about the hole. The bartender stands right in wid these gangs. If it had been night, you know, they would not have taken all this trouble to work the bunco biz; they would have given yer a dose in yer first glass of beer which would have laid you out so they could have got all yer stuff without any trouble."

"A regular house of call for thieves, eh?" the detective remarked.

There was something in the way in which the detective spoke which seemed to surprise the stranger.

He surveyed the disguised detective carefully for a moment, and then remarked:

"Say, mebbe you ain't so big a jay as you look?"

"Well, appearances are sometimes deceptive, you know," Joe Phenix replied with a laugh.

"Now, take you, for instance, you don't look like a man who would be able to make such a holy show out of three good, stout crooks, such as those fellows certainly were."

"Say! I guess you are up to some little game. I kin see now that you ain't half as big a jay as you look to be. Mebbe if I hadn't come in you wouldn't have been skinned arter all."

"Well, the rascals would not have got over five dollars, for that is about what I have in my wallet, but they most certainly would have got that, for the man behind my chair would have been a surprise to me. I anticipated that they were going to work the snatch-game upon me, but I should have been on the lookout for one of the two trying it."

"There is always three or four of them in a gang, and this crowd is as bad a one as you will find anywhere in New York. I know 'em, although they don't know me, for if they did they would never have tried to stand up ag'in' me."

"It is Kid Hiller's gang. That was Kid who came in with you, and the cops say that he is the smartest bunco man in the country."

"The man is away up at the top of the heap in his line. I saw that the moment he tried to pick me up, and that was the reason I came along with him. I had a curiosity to see how they worked the game, but I am a little curious about you too, my friend," the disguised detective added.

"I have seen some good boxers in my time, but I never saw any man handle his fists any better than you did to-day."

"That is my little biz, you know," the other explained. "I'm a pug!"

"A pugilist, eh?"

"Yes, I'm in the light-weight division, and though I say it myself what hadn't ought to, I kin stand up ag'in' any of 'em, 'cept two or three coves, like Jack McAuliffe, and men of his class."

"My name is Bob Herring—Herring Bob—every one calls me though, and I got the name 'cos I was brought up by an old fish-peddler."

"I was one of the kids that was born in the street, I s'pose, for I never knowed anything 'bout my father or mother, and the only name I ever had was Bob, until I got to going with the old fishman, and then some of the lads commenced to call me Herring, and the name stuck to me."

"Well, one name is about as good as another."

"That is the way I think, and I ain't kicking 'bout my name."

"I have had a mighty hard row to hoe all through my life, but I want you to understand, boss, that I have allers been on the square! I could have gone in with these crooks fifty times, but I wouldn't have it for a cent!"

"That is where you are wise; honesty always pays in the long run, and if you notice these crooks, no matter how successful they be for a while, yet in the end they always come to grief."

"You are right, and no mistake!" the other declared.

"Now, I don't make much out of this here fighting business, and I would like to quit it, but for a man like myself, w'ot ain't got no trade it is awful hard work to strike anything."

"This fighting business ain't what it is cracked up to be, you know," Herring Bob continued. A few of the big guns can make a raise once in a while, when they pull off a successful match. I have fought for as high as a thousand a side myself, and beat my man too. I was supposed to git half the stake, the backer took the other half, 'cos he found the money and made the match. Folks would say, 'Well he's got five hundred to the good, but when a cove comes to take his training expenses out—there's the trainer to pay, the board and things, and a stake to the seconds, a man is lucky to have two hundred left out of the five.'"

While the boxer had been speaking an idea had come to Joe Phenix.

"Why would not this young man make a good secret agent? Why not enroll him as one of the six?"

And the more the detective thought of the matter the better he was pleased with the idea.

"You would like to get into another line of business."

"Yes, I would!" the other replied decidedly. "I am sick of this 'ere kind of life that I am leading now! There ain't any show for a man to make anything in it."

"Now, I am giving it to you straight, and if you don't believe me all you have to do is to go to any of the sporting houses in the Bowery, and they will tell you that what I say goes, every time!"

"There's no money in the ring for a man like myself. I'm a dead game fighter, and I have never been licked yet; the nearest I came to it was two draws out of ten battles; but things are so bad with me now becos' I won't do any crooked work, that I am boxing at a sporting house in the Bowery for a tanner a week, and although I am not a drinking man yet the boss expects me to leave two or three dollars a week at the bar, and you kin see for yourself that there isn't much left for me, and it is all I kin do to pay for my room and my grub."

"Well, you have done me a service to-day and I would like to do something for you in return. Is there any place in the neighborhood

where we can go for a little quiet talk—where we can speak freely, without danger of being overheard?"

"Yes, there's a back room in the saloon where I box, and at this time of day there ain't much chance of any customers being in it. The saloon is a hang-out place for sports, and there ain't many of them around except at night; the day business does not amount to anything."

"That will do nicely."

"It won't take us long to go there, and I tell you, boss, if you can get me something to do I will be mighty glad, for I'm sick of this here kind of life that I am leading now."

"I think I can put you in a new road!" the other declared.

The sporting saloon was soon reached, and the pugilist escorted the disguised detective into the "drum," as the English fighting men call such a house.

CHAPTER VIII. NUMBER ONE.

THE detective was a man of the world and understood that in order to avail himself of the back room it would be necessary to order drinks, so he called for a couple of beers and then proceeded with the boxer to the rear apartment.

The saloon was a spacious one; there was a handsome bar in the front, and a partition, about seven feet high, with a swing door, divided the apartment in the center.

In the middle of the rear space was an elevated ring, about twenty feet square, with the regular stakes and ropes.

The "magic circle," as the sporting writers are fond of terming the space wherein the boxers meet, is always called a "circle" or "ring," although it is never round but square.

The small room to which the pugilist conducted the disguised detective was at the back of the apartment in which the ring was situated.

"This ain't much used," the boxers observed, after the two were seated and the beer was brought. "Sometimes a gang will come in the daytime and have a game of cards here, and at night the men who do the scrapping use it for a dressing-room. We box in full ring costume, you know."

"Just exhibition contests?"

"That is about all they are; the police wouldn't allow any regular fights, you know, but the boss gets up a fake every now and then on a Saturday so as to rope in the jays. There are plenty of jays right here in New York."

Joe Phenix nodded assent.

"There are four of us that do the fighting out, but the other three ain't of much account; one on 'em gets a fiver a week, and the others get whatever the boss chooses to give them, a couple of dollars, mebbe."

"You are the big gun of the show, I suppose?"

"Yes, and the boss has a standing offer out to give anybody ten dollars who kin stand up before me for four rounds, the Markis of Queensbury's rules, and once in a while some country Jake with more beer on board than is good for him, makes a try for the terror; then there's some fun, and the crowd get something for their money, but the jays who are on the fight are skeerce and I don't git a chance at many of 'em."

"Of course this snap won't last long, for all things of this kind play out pretty soon, and then I will be out of a job."

"Well, I think I can offer you something although it is odd kind of work."

"I don't keer a mite what the work is, so that you don't ask me to do anything crooked!" the boxer declared.

"I have been mighty hard-pushed at times and the temptation has been strong for me to go in with some of these lads who are on the cross, but I have managed to keep straight, right along, and I am going to hold out if I kin!"

"This job is all straight enough, but before I explain what it is, I want you to give me your word that you will keep the matter quiet even if you don't see your way clear to go into it."

"That is all right!" the boxer declared. "I am not the kind of chap to give anything away! I won't say a word if I can't make a trade with you, but you kin bet your bottom dollar that I am going into the thing if there is any show for me at all."

"This is a little bit of business in the detective line," Joe Phenix explained.

"Well, I reckoned that it was something of that sort!" the other exclaimed.

"I'm no fool, you know; any kid w'ot is brought up in the streets of New York the way I was, is bound to have a deal of hard boss sense knocked into him," the boxer continued.

"I thought first that you were a jay, and that is why I interfered to spile the game of those bunco chaps, but arter I got to talking wid you I see'd right off that I had made a mistake, and though you might look like a greenhorn you wasn't built that way, so, in course, I made up my mind that you were on the detective lay."

"Do you think you would like to try your hand at anything of that kind?"

"Yes, I would like to try it well enough," the boxer replied, scratching his head in a dubious way, "but, the trouble is, kin I do it? That is the p'int, boss! I never had no experience with

anything of the kind, and, mebbe, I would not be able to fill the bill."

"Oh, don't worry about that," Joe Phenix remarked. "You will be able to get through the work all right. This is in the detective line, and yet it is not regular detective business."

"If it is to go in and arrest a cove arter he is spotted, you kin jest bet yer life that I kin do it!" Herring Bob exclaimed, his face lighting up.

"I do not doubt that!" the disguised detective declared. "When you faced the bartender's revolver to-day you showed that you had courage enough for anything."

"Yes, and you can bet yer sweet life that that barkeep is a dandy tool!" the boxer declared. "He has shot and cut three or four men, but as his brother is one of the big politicians of the ward, with a pull at Headquarters, he has always managed to squeeze out of the trouble in some way. But when I grabbed that bottle to-day, and he got a look in my eyes, he saw that I was in it for keeps! And he knew it was jest as I told him too! Unless he stopped me at the first crack he would never have got a chance to pull on me a second time, for the bottle wouldn't miss fire, and arter I got one lick at him he would be booked for a free ride in the first back, and he knowed it, you bet, and that is why he weakened."

"Well, there may be a little work of that kind in the job."

"I kin do that, boss, to the queen's taste," Herring Bob declared, emphatically.

"Jest you p'int out the man and say to me, 'Bob, that cove is yer meat!' You can bet yer sweet life I will have him, or there will be some dead men 'round."

"Suppose I could get you a chance to enter the service of one of the rich men up in Fifth avenue, what could you do?"

"Well, I dunno," and Herring Bob shook his head in a doubtful way. "Blessed if I know! As I told yer, I was raised in the streets, and fighting is about all I understand. That came natural, in the first place, you understand, and then when some of the betting men saw that I was handy with my fists, they took me up, and had some of the pugs give me p'int; the idee of that, you see, was so they could make some money out of me; and they worked the trick all right, too, for I licked my first man inside of half an hour, and with the odds two to one ag'in' me, so the coves w'ot backed me landed a big pot of money, for the men on the other side thought they had a picnic when a novice was stacked up ag'in' their old pug, but he wasn't in it arter the first round, although he managed to last for eight."

"Do you know anything about horses—can you drive?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Yes; I never thought of that. I kin drive, and know how to take keer of a hoss—clean him, you know, and all that. The old fishman kept a hoss, and as he was an old countryman, understood the hull business, and you kin bet yer sweet life that he stood over me with a stick until I got so I could do the job as it ought to be done."

"I ain't no fancy coachman, you know, but, as far as that goes, I s'pose I can drive as well as nine-tenths of the men who brag in a big way 'bout how they kin handle the ribbons, but when it comes to cleaning a hoss and taking keer of him, I won't allow that there is anybody who kin do it any better than I kin!"

"You could take such a position without any one suspecting that it was a new thing to you?"

"Oh, yes, I could brag and blow 'bout where I have lived and how many hosses I handled jest the same as the rest of 'em, you know, and two-thirds of the yarns are allers lies!"

"But I say, 'bout the recommendation?" the boxer exclaimed, as an idea came to him. "I ain't got anything of the kind, and can't git any either—that is, not for hoss-tending; if it was as a slugger, I could fill a bushel basket with them," he added, with a grin.

"That will be attended to all right. Now, I propose to put you in the house of one of the wealthiest men in New York. You have heard of Abraham Englebert?"

"Oh, yes, Old Abe, and I have often seen his picture in the papers. I am werry fond of reading for a man in my line."

"He is the man whose service you are going to enter. As I said, he is one of the richest men in the city, if not the richest. Such men, with their enormous wealth are tempting marks for all kinds of rascals to aim their schemes at, and as there isn't much chance for a single scoundrel to accomplish anything, the rogues generally band together when a plot is hatched to make a victim out of a man like Mr. Englebert."

"Well, it is the regular thing, you know, for these crooks to travel in gangs; 'tain't often that you see one going alone on his own hook."

"You see, boss, I am well acquainted with these crooks, and know jest as much about 'em, almost, as if I was on the cross myself, for I growed up right among them."

"Well, there is a plot on foot to wrong Mr. Englebert out of some money and he has a suspicion that some of the people right in his own house are mixed up in it."

"That is the old game!" the boxer exclaimed. "I have heard of a thing of this kind a hundred times. When a gang gits the notion that a big stake can be made by cracking a certain crib, about the first thing they do is to git a pal into the house, and I know women, right here in New York, crooks' wives, who make a regular business of going out as servants, so as to git a chance to see whether the cribs they git into are worth cracking or not, and they allers go for the first-class houses, you understand."

"A game of that kind is being worked in this case, only I think there are two or three of the gang in the house."

"Do you mean it?" the other exclaimed in amazement. "Well, you kin bet yer sweet life now that these fellows are going in by the whole-sale! They are not only going to take the cake but the hull bake-shop!"

"Yes, they want to bleed this money-king to the tune of fifty thousand dollars."

"There isn't anything mean 'bout this gang is there?" Herring Bob exclaimed with a low whistle indicative of profound astonishment.

"They are in for a big stake," Joe Phenix observed. "I will get you a position as groom with Mr. Englebert, and you are to keep your eyes open after getting into the house, and I will arrange a place—some saloon in the neighborhood—where you can make your reports to me."

"I can do that all right!" Herring Bob declared. "I'm nobody's fool, you know, if I ain't anything but a slugger. I have always known enough to keep my tongue between my teeth, and nobody ever accused me of being anyways near-sighted."

"I will notify you when to call on Mr. Englebert, probably in answer to an advertisement, which he will put in the paper, for a groom, and he will understand that you are the right man by your repeating a certain sentence which I will tell you."

"All right, boss! I kin put this thing through, and don't you forget it!"

"Mr. Englebert will, of course, know that you are a spy, but you are to be careful not to say anything to him about the subject. Make all reports to me, and if any one in the house should suggest any crooked work to you, do your best to lead them on."

"Oh, yes, I'm fly! and if they kin be trapped I will do it!"

This ended the interview; the boxer saying that he could be found in the saloon at almost any time, and the disguised detective departed.

"One excellent man as a beginning!" Joe Phenix exclaimed with a deal of satisfaction.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHILD OF SORROW.

THE detective felt well satisfied with his success, and was in an extremely complacent mood as he walked up the street.

"I have an idea that this boxer will be an extremely useful man," he murmured, as he went on his way. "And it was a lucky accident that brought me in contact with him."

"What a splendid spy that bunco man, Kid Hilder, would make if I could only trust him."

"Ah! but there is the rub!" he continued, with a shake of the head. "I could no more trust that fellow, if he could rake a dollar by selling me out, than I could trust a hungry dog to watch a beefsteak."

"In fact, I believe that if he knew he could make more money by being honest than by following the devious life of a crook, he would rather take less coin and keep on in the path of rascality."

Then Joe Phenix walked on, deep in meditation, for awhile.

At last, again his thoughts formed themselves into words.

"Now in regard to this girl," he said. "She would be just the one I want in a case of this kind, I should judge, from what I saw of her at the time of that little burglar episode, but the question is, will it be possible for me to get her?"

"She may be away off for all I know, yet this is the season of the year when the people in her profession are usually idle, that is, the greater part of them, and I believe a large number make their home in the city."

"I suppose by going to the dramatic agencies I may be able to learn something about her."

"There is one in Union Square, and I will stop there first."

So the detective got into a car and rode up to Union Square, and when he left the car, as he gained the sidewalk, he came face to face with the very person he desired to see.

"Oho! I am in luck to-day!" Joe Phenix exclaimed.

It was a young and pretty girl who had attracted the detective's attention.

She was above the medium height, and rather stoutly built, but so exquisitely proportioned that a casual observer would never have suspected that she was possessed of far more strength than usually falls to the lot of woman-kind.

No one would be apt to call her a beautiful girl, for her features were irregular and strongly

marked; still there was something pleasing and attractive about her face, and she could not be termed ugly.

She was one of those girls who improve upon acquaintance, with a face which becomes more and more pleasing the longer you look at it.

Extremely ladylike and prepossessing was she in her appearance, and being dressed very neatly in a dark walking-suit, she did not answer at all to the popular idea of an actress.

But she was one, not a particularly prominent performer—not one of the kind that are able to command enormous salaries, and who live like princesses of the blood, surrounded by every luxury.

She was only one of the great rank and file, who are able to make a good living, and, if they are prudent, put by something for the proverbial rainy day, which seldom fails to come to all.

Joe Phenix had happened to make the girl's acquaintance about a year before the time of which we write, in an extremely romantic manner.

In order to keep a watch upon a fellow who was passing as a foreign count, and whom he suspected of being a swindling adventurer of the first water, the detective had taken a furnished room in an up-town flat, where the so-called count also had apartments.

The young actress, with another lady who was employed at the same theater—the girl had a New York engagement at the time—occupied a room in the flat.

Both of the young ladies possessed very handsome jewelry—diamonds, apparently; but as all is not gold that glitters, all white, sparkling stones are not diamonds, no matter how much like the real articles they may look.

The masquerading adventurer believed that the stones were the genuine articles though and took measures to relieve the ladies of their supposed treasures.

By keeping diligent watch he succeeded in discovering that the actresses in going out one day had neglected to wear their jewels, and he at once jumped to the conclusion that if he could gain admission to their apartment he would be able to possess himself of the sparklers.

To get into the room was for an expert rascal of his grade an easy matter, for he had previously taken an impression of the lock and so was able to get a key which opened the door as well as though it was the original article.

And when he was once inside it was no trouble for this experienced crook with his folding jimmy to force open the bureau drawers and the locked trunks, which he searched from top to bottom for the jewels.

He did not find the supposed diamonds, for the girls had them safely stowed away in their pocketbooks.

But he did discover some other trinkets and a sealskin sacque which he carefully wrapped up.

The noble count's funds were at such a low ebb that he did not disdain to descend to the level of the common street sneak-thief in order to procure money.

But just as he was coming out of the apartment with his plunder, who should he encounter but the two actresses, who had abruptly changed their mind about going forth and had returned.

The girls screamed and the thief swore!

Dropping his bundle he endeavored to escape.

He dashed upon the ladies and parted them to the right and left; one of them promptly fainted, but the other—the one of whom we are writing—was made of sterner stuff. She grasped the thief as he tried to rush past her, and then there was a desperate struggle in the entry, the rascal endeavoring to break loose from the girl, and she doing her best to hold on to him.

Just at this exciting moment Joe Phenix made his appearance. His room was on the next floor and the noise of the struggle had reached him.

Quickly comprehending that his man had been caught in some rascality, he hastened to the girl's assistance.

The fellow, comprehending that affairs were becoming desperate, with a violent effort tore himself loose from the grasp of the young actress, but as he turned to run the girl let fly her right fist with all the skill of a practical boxer, and the blow, catching the rascal just under the ear, knocked him into the corner all in a heap, and when he jumped to his feet and essayed to again run, the girl attacked him in regular pugilistic style.

One, two! out went the little white fists, and the "count," who, like most foreigners, was totally ignorant of even the first principles of the manly art of self-defense, was unable to defend himself; back he went into the corner again, dazed by the force of the blows, for though the strokes came from a woman, yet as she was a muscular one, and understood how to use the strength which Heaven had given her, the fellow was as soundly punished as though he had a man for an opponent.

At this point Joe Phenix came to the rescue, taking advantage of the bewildered condition of the thief, the detective snapped a pair of handcuffs upon him before the man was conscious of what was being done.

Then the detective searched the fellow and recovered the trinkets which he had stolen.

As it happened, though, the actresses did not have to come to court to press the charge against the man, for when he was brought before the chief of police to have his pedigree taken, it was discovered that he was an old offender, being wanted on an accusation of "assault with intent to kill," and in view of this mighty charge the lesser one of robbery was abandoned.

Joe Phenix had not encountered the young actress since that time, but he had often seen her name in the newspapers, and when he became engaged in this enterprise, and the question of secret agents came up, his mind immediately reverted to the young actress.

She was just the person he wanted, and now Dame Fortune had favored him so much as to bring him face to face with her.

The girl had not changed materially during the year which had elapsed since the little episode which had brought the two together, only she did not look as well as before, for there was an anxious, worried expression upon her face.

The detective forgetting for the moment that he was disguised so that his whole appearance was changed, stepped forward and accosted the young actress.

"How do you do, Miss Lawrence?" he said. "I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you for some time."

A surprised look appeared on the face of the girl, as she surveyed the speaker.

"Hav'n't you made some mistake, sir?" she inquired with a cold and distant air.

Then the truth flashed upon the man-hunter. The girl did not know him in his disguise.

"Oh, no, I have not made any mistake. I am an old acquaintance," he replied with a smile.

"You will pardon me, sir, if I am forced to contradict you!" the young actress exclaimed, drawing herself up, still more cold and reserved. "I have an excellent memory for faces and I am satisfied that I have never seen you before."

"Oh, yes you have; you know me well enough, if you do not recognize me, but that is because I am greatly changed, and do not look at all as I did when I made your acquaintance at the time I came to your assistance when you cornered the sneak thief. My name is Phenix."

A look of astonishment had come over the face of the lady as the detective proceeded with his explanation.

"Yes, I certainly did know a Mr. Phenix, who was a detective, but you do not at all resemble him," the young actress declared.

"I am the man, nevertheless! Sometimes, you know, it is necessary for a man in my line of business to change his appearance."

"Oh, yes, I understand that. But if you are Mr. Phenix in disguise, all I have to say is that it is perfect, and I should never have recognized you in the world!"

"Much obliged to you for the compliment," the man-hunter responded with a smile. "But I am the man, sure enough, and you are just the person I want to see. I have a little business on hand and I need the assistance of a lady like yourself. Are you at liberty to make an arrangement with me?"

"Oh, yes, I am at liberty," she replied, in a sad way. "But I don't know as I care to make any agreement. I am not in a very good condition just now. In fact, I am not worth much to myself or to anybody else."

The young actress spoke in a despairing way, which surprised the detective, for he knew her to be a light-hearted, jolly sort of girl usually.

"Well, I am sorry to hear that, but what is the matter? I am not an old friend, I know, merely an acquaintance, but I am going to take the liberty of asking."

"Oh, I'm only wretched and heart-sick, that is all!" exclaimed the young actress, with a sudden outburst of confidence. "But I suppose I ought not to expect any other fate. My mother, when she named me, called me Mignon, and that means a child of sorrow, you know, and so it isn't anything but right that I should be miserable. It is my kismet, and I ought not to grumble."

CHAPTER X. MIGNON'S STORY.

JOE PHENIX saw that the young actress was suffering, and he wondered greatly at it. His conjecture was that it must be a terrible blow indeed which could produce so great an impression upon a woman so full of courage and self-reliance.

"I am sorry to hear you speak in such a disconsolate way," the detective remarked. "But aren't you taking too gloomy a view of the matter? Most people who are resolute and impulsive as you are, are apt to do so."

"There is an old saying, you know, that there isn't anything so bad that it can't be mended."

"Yes; but like a great many other old sayings, it is not always true," Mignon Lawrence declared.

"You are an able man, Mr. Phenix, I know, and a wise one, too. I have often heard folks say that you are one of the greatest detectives

that New York has ever known, and if there is any man in the city who could give good advice I don't doubt that it is yourself, but I fear my situation is such that the sagest counsel will not do me any good."

"Of course, without knowing the facts in the case it is not possible for me to decide the question, but notwithstanding what you say, I am inclined to think you over-rate the matter."

Joe Phenix had come in personal contact with a great many of these "children of genius" in his time and he understood how common it was for them to exaggerate.

In prosperity they were in the seventh heaven of delight, but let the chilling winds of adversity blow upon them and immediately they were plunged in the depths of the deepest, darkest despair.

"Oh, no, I know what I am talking about," the girl replied, decidedly. "I think I have solved the conundrum, 'is life worth living?' and I have come to the conclusion that it is not!"

"That is a deplorable judgment at which to arrive, surely!"

"It is correct according to my lights. Of course, the situation might appear different to other eyes—to a man like yourself, for instance."

"Yes, I have no doubt that it would!"

"You can judge how badly things look to me and how desperate I am—how reckless of what becomes of me when I tell you where I am going!" the young actress declared.

"I shall be glad to learn, for though, as I said before, I am only an acquaintance, and cannot claim the honor of your friendship, yet I can assure you that I take just about as deep an interest in your welfare as any ordinary friend would do, and that is because you are rather an odd fish, being altogether different from any other woman whom I have ever met. That is the reason, I suppose, that when I found it would be necessary for me to have assistance in this business in which I am now engaged I thought immediately of you, and made up my mind to hunt you up if I could."

"Yes, I can understand how such a thing can be," the young actress observed thoughtfully.

"Why, take my own case; here I am telling you all about my business—confiding my troubles to you, just as if I had known you for years, and it does me good to talk about the matter."

"An open confession is good for the soul," you know," the detective observed smiling. "It is an old adage and one with a good deal of truth in it, I think."

"But I say, Miss Lawrence, this is rather a bad place to talk, and as it is about time to dine, suppose you honor me by taking dinner with me? We can go to Morello's on Fourth avenue, select a quiet, retired corner, have a good dinner, with a glass of wine to wash it down, and converse at our ease."

The girl hesitated for a moment as if uncertain, and then said, abruptly:

"Very well, I will go with you—accepting the invitation in the same frank spirit in which it is offered."

"Believe me, I am very much pleased at your decision!" Joe Phenix declared. "And I am sure that if I can persuade you to give me the assistance which I crave that you will not regret it."

Then he offered his arm to the actress; she accepted it, and was escorted by the detective to the French restaurant on Fourth avenue, known far and wide as the favorite resort of the sons and daughters of Bohemia, as the artist world of the great metropolis is termed.

The restaurant was an excellent one, the cooking perfect, the wines choice, the service perfection itself, and, best of all, the prices moderate.

The children of genius, who make up the motley world, dubbed Bohemia, because the first wandering entertainers of the public, the fortune-tellers, jugglers, dancers and acrobats were popularly supposed to have come from the kingdom of Bohemia, although mostly Gypsies in reality, but Bohemians they were called, and now the average singers, painters, actors, writers, take a certain pride in calling themselves sons and daughters of Bohemia, and this particular restaurant was the one above all others in the metropolis which they preferred to patronize.

As it was rather early for the regular patrons of the restaurant, the place contained few customers when the detective escorted the actress through the portal.

A table in a distant corner was chosen, and as there were no diners near, it was certain that the pair would be able to converse freely.

Joe Phenix was a gentleman by birth and breeding, used to the good things of this life, and a believer in the old maxim, that though a man might manage to exist without friends or books, yet civilized man must have cooks, and so was one who appreciated a good dinner.

"What would you like?" he asked, as he passed the bill of fare to the lady.

"Oh, it is immaterial to me," the girl replied, listlessly. "I am not hungry, and do not believe I can eat much of anything, anyway."

"In that case then your appetite must be coaxed, and something light and dainty must be ordered, and, for a beginning, we will have a

few raw oysters, little delicate fellows on the half-shell with a glass of chablis. I don't suppose that you object to a light wine?"

"Oh, no; I am not particularly partial to wine as a rule, but to-day I am in such a humor that I believe if you were to offer me brandy I would be willing to drink all you cared to give me!" the young actress declared in a feverish way.

"Oh, no, no!" the detective exclaimed. "No brandy! That would not do at all. If you were weak and sick, needing a strong stimulant—something to quicken the action of the heart, and after taking it you could lie down and sleep, then brandy is all right, nothing better in the world! But to take it now is not to be thought of for a moment!"

"The light wine will invigorate you, help to drive away this severe attack of the blues which I see you are laboring under, and make you take a more cheerful view of life."

"Ah, I am afraid not," Miss Lawrence responded with a sigh.

"Well, as I am acting as your doctor at present you must not only allow me to prescribe for you, but you must take the medicine with as good a grace as possible, and the harder you try to believe that I will do you good the more likely I am to accomplish a cure."

A slight smile illuminated the face of the young actress.

"Well, I will try my best to aid you all I can," she said. "I am sure I ought to do that, as you are taking so much trouble to try and rescue me from the slough of despair into which I am now plunged."

The detective gave his instructions to the waiter, ordering a light repast, a dainty dish, such as would be apt to tempt the appetite of a capricious woman, and requested that the wine and oysters be brought as quickly as possible.

The man promised dispatch and departed.

"Now, then, we can go ahead," Joe Phenix remarked. "I judge from what you said when we conversed on the corner that you meditated doing something desperate, when I encountered you."

"Yes, I am going to make a fool of myself as most women do when they get in a certain state of mind," the girl replied, frankly.

"Well, that is bad, and I am heartily glad I happened to meet you so as to interfere with the execution of this design."

"Oh, I guess that the meeting with you will only postpone it for awhile," Miss Lawrence remarked, with a mournful smile.

"If you don't mind telling me what you thought of doing, I shall be better able to judge in regard to that matter," the detective observed.

"I suppose a man that follows the profession that you do, must be pretty well acquainted with New York," the young actress observed, abruptly.

"Yes, I believe I am well posted."

"Do you know about the opium joints in Pell street?"

"Certainly! I have been in about all of them. They change their quarters every now and then," the detective explained.

"You see, the police have sudden spasms of virtue, very severe attacks sometimes, and while under the influence of these fits they 'clean out' the dens of wickedness which have been flourishing right under their noses; the opium joint shuts up shop for awhile until matters resume their normal state, and then business is resumed somewhere in the neighborhood of the old stand, and so it goes."

"Yes, I have read in the newspapers of these police raids, and I knew that they did not drive the opium joint out of existence, for I have known of their goings-on for the last five years or so, for I am well acquainted with a lady in the variety business—she is what they call a serio-comic—and she has delighted to 'hit the pipe,' as she terms it, ever since I have known her."

"An opium fiend, eh?"

"Yes, I have often heard her call herself by that name, but she always declared that there was a deal of method in her madness."

"She explained that the common belief that when any one began to hit the pipe they became such a slave to the habit that it soon resulted in their utter ruin was no more true than the notion of the temperance people that every man who drinks liquor at all is on his way to a drunkard's grave."

The detective smiled.

"If that was true the undertakers would have a harvest, and the saloons would soon be forced to close up for want of patronage," Joe Phenix remarked.

"This girl is a regular patron of the opium joints, and the opium smoking does not seem to injure her any, but she says that is because she does not smoke to excess."

"I have been to the opium dens with her a half-dozen times, and got so that I knew how to hit the pipe as well as any of the regular patrons. The opium must first be cooked in a peculiar manner, you know, before it is fit to put in the pipes."

"Yes, I understand the process," Joe Phenix

replied. "And I will have to admit that there was a time in my life when I knew how to hit the pipe with the best of them; not only that, but I indulged in even a worse vice, I was an opium-eater."

"The world looked very black to me then and I sought forgetfulness."

"I can understand the feeling for I am under its influence now," the girl remarked.

"Undoubtedly I would have gone down to ruin had I not rallied and made a fight against the melancholy demons who were tempting me to self-destruction, and you must do the same thing," the detective counseled. "You must not give way to despair. There is no cloud so black but what it has a silver lining, and let me tell you there is considerable truth in the old saying that the darkest hour is always before the dawn."

"Yes, I presume that is so, but I am in such a state of mind that I am utterly regardless of whether I live or die," the young actress replied.

"When you encountered me I was just about to take a car for down-town and my objective point was an opium joint in Pell street."

The arrival of the waiter with the oysters and wine interrupted the conversation at this point.

When the man retreated, Joe Phenix resumed the conversation.

"Now, then, drink about half of your wine," the waiter had filled the glasses with the bubbling amber-colored fluid, the generous juice of the grapes which ripened on the vine-clad hills beneath the sun of the Old World. "And see if it will not help to make existence look a little brighter to you."

The young actress smiled faintly, but obeyed the command.

"It is a lovely wine!" she declared, as she felt the generous liquid course through her veins.

The detective had ordered the best that the restaurant afforded, and as the place was patronized by all the foreign opera singers, people who know what good wine is—who have tasted all the famous vintages of Europe, and who never grumbled at the price, for these rare song-birds, as a rule, held their money as light as the purse wherein they do carry the coin, it followed that the wine was as good of its kind as could be procured in the city, no matter at what price.

"Yes, and it ought to enable you take a more cheerful view of things and matters in general."

"Now, while we eat our oysters and sip the wine, you can tell me what you were going to do at the opium joint in Pell street, for I assure you I take a decided interest in your story, but it is my belief that you will not get to that quarter to-day."

CHAPTER XI.

A SAD RECITAL.

THE young actress took up one of the oysters and surveyed it for a moment; it was a little, round, fat "Shrewsbury," a really delicious morsel, far better than anything that the ancient Roman epicures could boast of in their elaborate feasts.

"It does look good enough to eat, doesn't it?" she remarked.

The wine was beginning to have an effect; the appetite of an extremely healthy young woman was manifesting that it had an existence, despite the doubts of the lady.

All she had eaten that day had been her breakfast, and the meal had been an extremely frugal one, consisting only of a cup of coffee and a single roll, and as it was now after five o'clock it was no wonder that the animal nature of the girl craved nourishment, even if the intellectual part had come to the belief that the good things of this world no more would tempt her.

"Try it and see!" the detective remarked, as he proceeded to dispose of his share.

The oyster did taste good, and three others quickly followed the first; then she finished her wine, drinking it with an evident relish.

Joe Phenix was on the lookout, and immediately replenished the glass.

"Well, when I came in here I did not believe that I could eat a morsel, but I find I am not so good a judge of myself as I thought I was, Miss Lawrence remarked."

"So far, then, my treatment is a success," the detective observed.

"Indeed it is, and I will be glad to give you a first-class recommendation, if you ever want one!"

And then the young actress proceeded to finish her oysters, and after they were gone, helped herself to the wine.

The color had begun to come into her cheeks, and the ugly lines of care to disappear.

The detective noticed the change.

"You already look a hundred per cent. better than you did when I met you!" he declared.

"Yes, and I feel a deal better, too," she replied.

"And I am decidedly astonished at it, for a deeper, darker fit of the blues than I had when I met you on the corner no woman ever experienced."

"Human nature is fickle, and as prone to

change as the sparks to fly upward," the detective observed.

"Well, the oysters, or the wine, or both, have given me an appetite, and I know I can eat something now. What have you ordered?"

"Chicken fricassee."

"That's good! it is a favorite dish of mine, and the chef here cooks it divinely!" the girl exclaimed.

"Ah, I guess you will not die yet awhile."

"No, I reckon not, as they say in the wild and woolly West!" the girl exclaimed, the color increasing in her cheeks, and her eyes sparkling, so that really she looked to be quite pretty.

"And now tell me why you were going to the opium joint? To hit the pipe and woo forgetfulness?"

"Well, yes, and a little more. I have in my pocket ten dollars, which I got by pawning my watch and chain, easily worth fifty, and I was going to the opium joint with the intention of staying there and hitting the pipe until the ten vanished into thin air."

"Well, as you are not a regular opium fiend, the result would probably be to bring you pretty near to death's door."

"Yes, that was my calculation, and if I had not encountered you I would have certainly been in the opium joint by this time, enjoying the first stages of my experiment."

"And now the motive for this rash-planned act?" Joe Phenix asked. "The motive must be a strong one, or else a woman like yourself would never have even dreamed of committing such an act of folly."

"It is a sad tale, and soon told!" the actress declared, her brow growing dark again. "It is the old, old story, too, a trusting, loving woman, who believed that the man was honest when he swore at the altar to love and protect her until grim death stepped in between them, and a vile wretch, too lazy to work, who sought for a wife, either worth money, or able to earn enough to support not only herself but a husband as well."

"You have been married then?"

"Yes, to my sorrow!"

"It is strange how unlucky the marriages of so many professional people turn out to be," the detective observed in a reflective way.

"Oh, no, that is a mistake!" the actress declared. "The professional people get along just about as well in married life as the rest of the world. The trouble is that when people in public life get into a difficulty everybody knows of it, for some busybody is sure to run to a newspaper with the tale, and the journals are always glad to print any gossip about the stage people. If John Smith the tailor, or carpenter, or groceryman quarrels with his wife and beats her, no newspaper takes the trouble to print any account of the affair, unless the police interfere, and all the parties get lugged off to the station-house, but you just let the husband of an actress give her a black eye, somebody will be sure to get a full account of the affair into a newspaper instantler."

"Professionals, you see, are living in regular glass houses, and although by rights the public have no business whatever to peer into their private life yet they do it all the same, and this constant printed tattle about what the professional people are doing when they are off the stage, is responsible for the idea that their married life is not an agreeable one."

"Well, I rather think that you are right," the detective observed. "I never gave much thought to the matter, and I suppose I have allowed myself to be deceived by the statement which is so often made in the public prints that the public favorites do not get on well in the married state."

"The writers simply jump to a conclusion without taking the trouble to look carefully into the facts of the case!" the young actress asserted.

"If they were to take a hundred married people in the private walks of life, select them at random, then take a hundred married professionals in the same way and examine carefully into the question of how happy or unhappy they were in the marriage relation, I think they would discover that it was six of one and half-a-dozen of the other."

"I believe that you are right, now that I come to bring what knowledge I have to bear upon the subject," the detective observed. "And the reason for the popular belief to the contrary is just about as you say. In one case the affair is hushed up, and nobody hears anything about it; in the other all the details are given to the world, and, undoubtedly, as highly colored as the ready pen of the scribe can possibly produce."

"Oh, that is the truth, and, as a rule, when professional people do not get along it is because one of them is not in public life, and when a wife is on the stage and the husband is not, or the husband acts and the wife remains at home, jealousy and distrust arise and that coldness, which is so destructive of love, comes between the two."

"As far as my judgment goes you are right in this assumption too."

"Now in my case, my trouble came because I married a man who was not in public life!" the young actress declared.

"I have always been a very particular young woman all my life—one of the girls who was believed to be marked for an old maid because I never had any love affairs, but I met my fate at last, just as such girls usually do. At the house of a friend I became acquainted with a young Englishman—a good-looking, dashy-fellow with such a wheedling tongue that, like the Irishman's hero, he could swear a hole in the bottom of an iron pot and lie the legs off afterward."

"He made desperate love to me, and, as the boys say, told such fairy tales that he turned my foolish head."

"Lorraine Trevanion was his name; he was the younger son of a good family; all that stood between him and a noble title, with a princely estate attached, was one weak life, his elder brother, who had been sickly from his birth, and whose death was liable to take place at any time."

"A brilliant prospect, truly. I do not wonder that you were dazzled by it."

"And I am no silly girl either, but one who has fought for herself ever since she was old enough to do anything. I ought to have had experience enough to suspect there was something wrong about the man, but I did not."

"He always had plenty of money, dressed well, was evidently a gentleman, well reared and educated."

"I was not, you know," the girl admitted, candidly. "I grew up like a weed, and about all I know I picked up here and there, for I hardly had a year's schooling in my life."

"No one would believe it though to hear you talk, and you certainly know how to behave yourself like a lady."

"Well, I happened to have fortunate surroundings when I was growing up, the people with whom I lived were educated and refined, although poor, and the actors and actresses, as a class, if they are not all gentlemen and ladies, they try their best to appear to be, and so have a false polish if they lack the true article."

"The nature of the business requires it."

"Well, to make a long story short, the Englishman wooed and won me; we were married, and for three or four months I lived in a fool's paradise."

"I was getting a good salary, and had saved up quite a little sum of money, for I was one of the prudent kind."

"Of course I did not make any secret of this fact; my husband knew it, and when his money, which he said came regularly from England, failed to arrive, I drew on my bank account for his benefit."

"Then he pretended that his folk in England were angry with him because he had married a plain American girl, when there were plenty of women at home with money and titles who would have been glad to marry him, and when he told me that he preferred his dear little Yankee girl to all the titled beauties, I was fool enough to believe him."

"And he asked you then for more money?" the detective observed, dryly.

"Yes, and he got it too, got all I had saved up but the last fifty dollars, and this I was not willing to give him, for I have always had a fear of being taken ill, and so made it a rule to keep a little money in reserve."

"Very prudent indeed!"

"But when I explained to my husband my reason for holding on to the money he grew angry and said it was all nonsense. I ought to let him have the cash and as soon as his funds came from England he would repay the amount."

"And you let him have it, of course?"

"No, I didn't!" the girl responded, spiritedly. "I was beginning to get my eyes open. We had been married over three months when this episode happened, and during all that time he hadn't received a cent except what I had given him."

"I am no fool, you know, and the moment my suspicions became aroused the man was not smart enough to keep me in the dark!" the young actress declared.

"Then too, when he found that I was firm about this last fifty dollars, and was beginning to grumble about his borrowing all of my salary that I had left after paying our board-bill—this I settled every week from the time of my marriage, he began to throw off the mask and one day he asked me bluntly what I supposed he married me for if not for a support, for he certainly had not been fascinated by my beauty."

"A wise sort of a remark for a husband to make to a young wife."

"Yes, wasn't it?" and Miss Lawrence's lip curled in contempt. "I know I am not a beauty but no woman likes to be reminded of the fact, and least of all by the man whom she has married."

"Now, I have a temper of my own; I will not deny it, and retorted pretty hotly; the result was a violent quarrel, which ended in my gentleman saying that he would have to give me an example of how Englishmen treated ugly-tempered wives, and then he slapped my face about as hard as he could!" And as the girl uttered the sentence she colored to the temples with indignation.

"The brute!" Joe Phenix exclaimed. "But I imagine from what I know of your acquirements that you soon satisfied the man he had made the biggest kind of a mistake in attacking you in such an outrageous manner."

Despite the heat of indignation which filled her heart when the events of the past came back to her memory she laughed outright as Joe Phenix's words fell upon her ears.

"Yes, you are right," she replied. "The minute after he slapped my face he discovered that he had caught a Tartar."

"And I didn't go at him open-handed, like a scratch-cat, after the usual womanly fashion. Although I am a woman it happens that I know how to use my fists about as well as a professional male boxer."

"When I was about sixteen I traveled with a combination, playing a boy's part in the drama, and one of the actors was an expert boxer. In fact he had won the amateur middle-weight championship of England; he and I were great chums, for he was a royal good fellow, and from him I learned to box; after we had practiced for three or four months he did me the honor to say that it would take a good professional boxer to hold his own with me."

"So I should judge from the way you handled that sneak-thief. You hammered him to a standstill in no time—'stopped' him in the first round, to use the sporting term."

"Yes, and I 'stopped' my husband in the first round too!" the young actress declared, with flashing eyes. "I flew at him like a tiger."

"After slapping my face he had stepped back with a sneer on his lips as much as to say, 'How do you like that as a sample of the way I am going to treat you?' I measured the distance and let him have a right-hander between the eyes which floored him as though he had been shot. I was 'mad' all the way through, you understand, and I hit him for all I was worth! That is slang, but it expresses my meaning beautifully!"

"Well, I am a strong and tough man, but I will be hanged if I should like you to hit me as hard as you could!"

"When he got up he had a pair of the most elaborate black eyes that mortal man ever beheld!" Miss Lawrence declared.

"He was game, though, and came at me with murder written in his face, if it ever appeared on a man's features!"

"As it happened, I had never said anything to him about my being able to box, and he made the mistake of thinking the blow was just an accidental one."

"Inside of a minute, though, he discovered that he had made a mistake, for as he rushed at me I parried his clumsy blows without any trouble, and then made a left-hand swing at his jaw, and caught him fairly on the point of it."

"The professional pugilist's favorite knock-out blow!"

"Exactly! and it knocked my gentleman out, too, and I don't doubt that when the blow struck him he got the idea that his chin had broken loose and was going up through the roof of his head."

"And that settled the matter, I suppose?"

"Yes, it was fully a minute before he got up, and then he sat down on the nearest chair and looked at me in wonder."

"I seized upon the opportunity to read him a lecture."

"You see, I know how to protect myself," I said. "And neither you nor any other man can slap my face without getting a good pounding in return."

The approach of the waiter at that moment with the chicken interrupted the conversation.

"I am glad it has come!" the young actress declared, as she surveyed the waiter arrange the dishes with the expertness of a man who understood his business.

"Doesn't it look delicious, though? I have got a famous appetite now, although I did think that I should never want to eat anything again."

The waiter having retired, Joe Phenix refilled the actress's wine-glass, and the pair proceeded to enjoy the chicken, which was cooked to perfection.

"This is a treat, indeed!" Miss Lawrence declared. "And I move we drink to the health of the chef, who is a genius and no mistake!"

"I am with you!" the detective declared, and so the health of the cook was duly drunk.

"And now I will finish my story between bites," the young actress remarked.

"You are a she-devil and I will be even with you for this!" my husband exclaimed. My blood was up by this time and I told him plainly that I would not stand any abuse from him in any way and that if he wanted to get along with me he must keep a civil tongue in his head."

"He was thoroughly cowed and replied that he was sorry there had been any trouble but he hoped we would get along better in the future."

"That was a week ago, and he seemed to be anxious to get along all right. My city engagement ended on Saturday night and this morning I got my salary and as there is no prospect of my getting anything to do for a month or more,

I was very glad indeed that I had the fifty dollars in the bank."

"After getting my salary I went home and put the money in my trunk, then went out to make a call, telling my husband that I would not be back until about one o'clock."

"I returned just at the time I said I would, and when I entered my room a scene of confusion met my eyes."

"My trunks had been forced open and everything valuable taken out. All my jewelry, my costly street and stage dresses, my sealskin sacque, in short, not an article was left which was worth anything."

"I neglected to state that we had left the boarding-house, taken a furnished room in a flat and gone to housekeeping so as to reduce expenses."

"This was my husband's idea—his suggestion, which was made after we had the trouble."

"He had the idea of plundering you in his mind, and wanted to get you in such a position that he could execute the scheme without difficulty," the detective observed, his keen wits immediately guessing at the truth.

"If you had remained in the boarding-house it would have bothered him to have got the things out without being seen and the boarding-house keeper would undoubtedly have taken the alarm, and made an objection."

"Oh, it was all a carefully contrived plan, as I discovered afterward!" the actress declared, her face expressive of scornful contempt.

"The moment I entered the room I suspected the truth; I had been robbed and was deserted by the man whom I trusted, but I hoped against hope, and cried out—trying to deceive myself, you know—'Oh, some sneak-thief has been here!'"

"Then a bit of paper with some writing on it, lying on the table, attracted my attention."

"A brief, farewell note from the man who had robbed and deserted you, I suppose?"

"Exactly! here it is, so you can read for yourself," and the actress took a crumpled half-sheet of note-paper from her pocket and handed it to the detective.

Joe Phenix read it aloud, and it ran as follows:

"MON CHERE AMI! dear, darling prize-fighter! I am off with a more congenial companion, and as I am short of cash have taken some of *our* things so as to raise the wind. It will not do you any good to kick up a row, for a husband cannot steal from his wife, you know. What is yours is mine, and *vice versa*. It is the law!"

"I believe that is correct!" the actress said.

"I presume so, but I have never heard of a case where it was the husband who made off with the property," the detective said. "But I have heard a dozen times of a wife who ran off with the cash, and being arrested on the husband's complaint has been discharged on the ground that no crime had been committed. Husband and wife are one in the eyes of the law, and a person cannot steal from himself. That is the argument, you know."

"Yes, I guess the sneak knew what he was about!" the young actress exclaimed, her lip curling in contempt.

"After I read the note my first thought was of my bank-book—it was gone! and the way I flew around to that bank was a caution."

"My fears were confirmed; my husband had been there, presented the book, and an order signed by me, and drawn out all the cash. The bank people knew him well, for he had written orders before which I had signed, when he borrowed the money from me, so they had no suspicion that anything was wrong and paid the money without question. I was left almost penniless!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE DETECTIVE'S COUNSEL.

"UPON my word! I think that, taking this affair in all its details, it is about the meanest piece of rascality that I have ever heard of!" Joe Phenix declared.

"Wasn't it though?" the young actress exclaimed with sparkling eyes.

"After my visit to the bank I returned to my room and sat down amid the wreck like Marius among the ruins of Carthage."

"Not a bad simile!" the detective exclaimed. "For you, like that sage and warrior, had grim despair for a companion."

"Yes, as I said, I was almost without money. I had less than a dollar in change in my pocket-book. My salary, which I had got that morning, if you remember, I had not taken out of the envelope but put in in the trunk just as it was. I had no fear, for my husband said when I went out that he should stay at home until my return."

"All my jewelry was in the trunk, for I had risen late, dressed in a hurry, and had not worn any of it, and I should not have had my watch and chain, only that the watch happened to be out of order and the chain broken, so both were at the jeweler's for repairs, and I got them as I came home."

"That was lucky."

"Yes, wasn't it?"

"Well, as I sat amid the wreck, so angry and bewildered by this unexpected blow that I did not know what to do, one of the actresses who

had been in the same theater with me came in, and when she expressed her amazement at the condition of the room I did not attempt to conceal the truth from her, but related just how I had been treated.

"And then the reason for her call came out. She had just come from the Pennsylvania Railway depot, where she had been to see a friend off, and there she had encountered my husband and with him was a young actress whom I had believed to be my dearest friend, a girl that I had helped a hundred times, and this was the one who had taken my husband away from me!"

"Ah, yes, it was extremely mortifying to you, no doubt," Joe Phenix observed. "But you ought to have consoled yourself with the thought that such sins almost invariably carry with them their own punishment."

"Yes, I know that to be the truth."

"And from your experience with your husband, you ought to be able to predict that at some time in the future she will be treated by him in about the same way as you were treated by the rascal."

"Yes, that is more than likely. The precious pair had no hesitation in announcing that they were going away together, and my husband abused me in the most dreadful way, said I was a horse of a woman and he intended to get a divorce from me when he got out West, and then he and the lady would be married."

"Well, if that programme is carried out you will be revenged upon the woman, undoubtedly!"

"Ah, yes, but my rage and mortification at the moment was too great for such a thought to be any consolation to me, and after my visitor departed, I became such a prey to black despair that I resolved to seek forgetfulness in the opium joint, so I pawned my watch and was on the way there when I encountered you. There is my story in full, and I can tell you that a more despondent and heart-sick woman never walked the streets of New York than I was when you met me!"

"You feel a great deal better now though, I imagine," the detective remarked with a quiet smile.

"Indeed I do, and I can thank you for it too!" the young actress exclaimed, disposing of the last morsel of the chicken, and then washing it down with the last of the wine.

"I suppose you may regard it as a lucky chance that you happened to meet me!"

Then the detective nodded to the waiter.

"Now, for a finale, I will suggest a rum omelet and a cup of black coffee with a little good French brandy in it."

"That will do nicely!" Miss Lawrence exclaimed. "Ah, Mr. Phenix, you are a most excellent doctor, for you heal the mind as well as the body!"

"Yes, I think I will have to set up as a Faith-curer, that is the latest fad, you know," the detective remarked after the waiter departed.

"But really in this matter of yours, you must excuse me for saying it, but you acted in an extremely unreasonable way."

"Yes, exactly like a woman, eh?" responded the young actress, with a merry laugh. "All the world knows that women are unreasonable creatures and so it is not to be wondered at that in my trouble I should decide to make a complete fool of myself."

"I would suggest a different course of action entirely," Joe Phenix remarked.

"From the description that you had given of this Lorraine Trevanion, I am under the impression that he is one of the English adventurers who are forced to come to this country on account of their own land becoming too hot to hold them."

"His younger son and noble family business is all a ghost story; and the money which he pretended to get from England was probably picked up here by card-sharping, or billiard playing. I have known of some of these English rascals hitting the up-town bloods, who ape London fashions, for heavy amounts before their true characters were discovered, and they were unceremoniously kicked out of decent society."

"I should not be surprised if that was the case with my husband for he was a great fellow for cards and billiards," Miss Lawrence remarked. "But I never heard him say anything about winning anything, or even speak of playing for money. I thought he played just for amusement, of course."

"Oh, they do, but the bloods usually put up a small stake, so as to make the game interesting; that is the excuse, but when the players get excited in the course of the game the small sum soon swells into a large one, and so the card or billiard sharper is able to carry away a good deal of money—if he wins, and he usually does, for it is a business with him, and it is not an easy matter for an amateur to beat a professional."

At this point the waiter came with the omelet and the coffee.

The detective poured the rum over the omelet and set it on fire after the custom, then helped his fair companion to a generous share.

"This chef is a darling!" the young actress declared, with her mouth full of the savory compound. "You must excuse my slang, but

one hears so much of it nowadays, that even a woman may be pardoned if she indulges in it once in a while, and then some of it is so sweetly expressive!"

"Yes, that is true. But to return to our mut-ton: If a man had been wronged as you have been, his first thought would be of revenge, and he would have set to work to make the doers of the injury pay dearly for their villainy."

"Yes, and that is the right way to do, and that is what I will do, too!" Miss Lawrence exclaimed, sipping the fragrant coffee, which had just enough brandy in it to send the blood dancing along through her veins.

The wise counsel of the acute detective, and the good things of Monsieur Morello, combined, had wrought a transformation in the girl, and she now looked fully ten years younger than when she had come face to face with Joe Phenix, less than an hour ago on the curbstone.

"I am going to offer you the best chance in the world to right the wrong that has been done you, and I promise you that I will take up your quarrel with as much vigor as if it was my own."

"I shall be ever so much obliged!" the young actress declared. "Indeed, I don't know how I am ever going to thank you for what you have already done for me, for, most certainly, though you are but an acquaintance, and I have no claim on your friendship, yet you have treated me as well as if I was the oldest and dearest friend that you had in the world!"

"Well, I must own up; I suppose that there is a little bit of policy in that," Joe Phenix said, with a smile. "I am desirous of enlisting your services, and so I must do my best, of course, to get on your right side."

"I am afraid that you are trying to make yourself out a deal worse than you are!" Miss Lawrence declared, shaking her finger archly at the other.

"Oh, no; but to come down to business. You said at the beginning that you did not think you would care to negotiate. What do you think now?"

"That I am willing to make almost any kind of an arrangement with you!" the young actress replied, promptly. "Let me know what it is you want me to do, and I will try to do it to the best of my ability."

Then the detective explained to her the nature of the enterprise in which he wished to enlist her aid.

"Oh, yes, I know all about the parties!" she exclaimed when he had finished. "I have seen the old man in a box at the theater, the daughter also, who is a sweet girl, if any dependence can be placed upon faces, and the son, Maurice, I know all about. He is something of a dule, and was very much in love with a friend of mine once, a pretty girl who was at the Paragon Theater when I was there."

"He run after actresses, eh?" Joe Phenix exclaimed. "That is a point worth knowing!"

"Well, I cannot say much about his habits in that respect, but he certainly did run after this girl, although she did not care a snap for him. She was in love with an actor in the company, whom she afterward married, and all the wealthy dules in New York couldn't turn her from the man she loved."

"She was a mercenary creature though, and took all the presents that anybody chose to give her, for she argued that if they saw fit to make fools of themselves by bestowing costly things upon a girl who told them plainly that she did not care anything for them, it was not her fault. She had her mother as a protector, you see, and so none of these love-sick bloods could get any chance to annoy her."

"Yes, I see. Do you suppose that this young man would be apt to recognize you if you took a position in the household of Englebert?"

"Oh, no!" the young actress replied, decidedly. "I never really made his acquaintance. I used to see him waiting at the back-door of the theater, with the rest of the Johnnies, to see the girls come out, but that was all."

"I do not think there is much danger of his recognizing you because he has witnessed your performances on the stage," the detective remarked, thoughtfully.

"No, I do not think there is any probability of that. I am not a beauty, you know, and so I have to put on such an elaborate make-up in order to look well on the stage that few people ever recognize in the homely girl whom they encounter on the street the beautiful—according to the play-bill—Miss Mignon Lawrence!" and the girl made a grimace at the end of the speech.

"Well, you might be a deal worse looking," was the detective's comment.

"Oh, I don't know about that! But as I don't care anything about the matter it does not wrong me at all."

"Are you willing to join my band of secret agents?"

"Oh, yes."

"And it is my belief that you will be an extremely valuable one."

"Well, if there is any 'knocking out' to be done I think you can safely count on me to attend to the business and 'do up' the man in a

style worthy of the great John L. Sullivan, champion of champions."

"Now, then, here is a point which may bother us a little," the detective observed, reflectively. "I want to introduce you into the household, and the question immediately arises—what can you do?"

"Bless me! that is true, isn't it!" the girl exclaimed. "I never thought of that. I am to be there for use and not for ornament, of course."

"A great money-king like Old Abe doesn't want a burlesque actress, nor a serio-comic, and a song and dance lady is not essential to the happiness of a well-regulated Fifth avenue household."

"Hardly," observed Phenix, smiling.

"I don't know anything about type-writing, stenography is a foreign science, and I cannot write well enough for a private secretary."

"I have it!" Miss Lawrence cried, abruptly. "I am a lovely hair-dresser, and when it comes to getting a girl into good harness I am renowned!"

"That will do. Put me down for a lady's maid. One of the kind that has always lived with the upper crust and know what is what."

"Yes, that will work."

The detective arranged a means of communication, and as the coffee was finished just at this time the interview came to an end.

Joe Phenix escorted the lady to the street and there parted with her.

Back to the rifled, furnished room went the girl with a light heart.

"Yes, he is right!" she cried. "What a fool I was to dream of killing myself with nasty opium when I ought to live for vengeance!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN FROM SING SING.

JOE PHENIX walked slowly to Union Park and seated himself upon a bench.

The sun was rapidly going down and the great human current was setting strongly to the northward.

In the early morning hours almost everybody is going down town, to the southward, but as evening approaches the tide turns and people hurry along in the opposite direction, apparently fully as anxious to get up town as they had been eager in the morning to go down.

It was a favorite amusement of the detective to watch the faces of the people as they hurried along the street.

It is a characteristic of the average American to always appear to be in a great hurry, and nowhere in the country is this trait so strongly defined as in the metropolis of New York. Men rush along as though their lives depended upon their speed.

They run after street cars, and gallop for boats as though they did not expect that there would be another one along for hours, yet, in nine cases out of ten, there is not any need of haste.

As the detective sat upon the bench and surveyed the features of the passing crowd, he was studying human nature, the book wherein he most delighted to read.

The detective felt extremely well-satisfied with his day's work.

"I hardly expected to secure such good people," he murmured, communing with himself after the fashion of deep thinkers.

"The man is a splendid fellow in his way, and the girl equally good in hers," he continued. "And the best of the matter is there is not a doubt that both can be depended upon."

"That is the point where the ordinary stool-pigeon and police spy is generally weak. They are venial—can be bought, and the shadow who can be bribed is worse than useless; if the spy cannot be depended upon to be faithful to his trust, it would be better that he should not be employed at all."

As the disguised detective came to the end of these questions, a man detached himself from the passing throng, and took a seat upon the bench, a yard or so from Joe Phenix.

The stranger favored the detective with a scrutinizing glance as he sat down, but Joe Phenix pretended not to notice him.

It was the detective's game to always see everything, while making believe not to see anything.

The stranger was a rather undersized, but thick-set and muscular man, with a good-looking face, although now there was a haggard and care-worn expression upon it which seemed to indicate that the man was not easy in his mind.

He was attired neatly in a dark suit, and any one, who was a good judge of men, would have taken him to be some small tradesman or mechanic.

After taking a seat upon the bench he studied the face of Joe Phenix for a while, and the detective, keeping a watch on him out of the corner of his eyes, saw that he seemed to be perplexed.

Then the man looked up and down for a few moments as if he was searching for something which he was not able to find, and the longer the detective looked at him, the greater became his impression that the man was not a stranger, but he was unable to remember when, or where, he had met him.

Then the man drew out his handkerchief, took off his hat and wiped his forehead, and when Joe

Phenix got a view of the man without his hat, like a flash came the remembrance of where he had encountered the stranger.

He had not made a mistake—not been deceived by any accidental resemblance.

Then the man replaced his hat, folded his handkerchief in a peculiar way and placed it on his knee, covering the center of it with his hand, and after he did this he glanced toward Joe Phenix as though to question whether he had noticed the movement.

The acute detective understood that this handkerchief business was a signal.

The stranger expected to meet some one—a man to him unknown, evidently, and he thought that Joe Phenix might be the party.

"I am in luck!" the detective muttered to himself. "I have evidently struck some game here, and if I play my cards well I may be able to find out all about it!"

Rapidly he mapped out in his mind a plan of action.

Turning slowly in his seat he pretended to notice the man for the first time.

He surveyed him as one stranger might be expected to survey another in such circumstances.

Then the disguised detective allowed a look of recognition to gradually creep over his face, and said:

"Say, excuse me, sir, but I think I have met you before somewhere?"

"Well, yes, I had an idea of that kind too, but I was not able to remember just how the thing was," the other replied.

Joe Phenix cast an inquiring look around, just as if he was afraid that some one might be playing the spy upon the conversation, and then, moving a little nearer to the other, he observed in a low and cautious tone:

"Well, if I haven't made any mistake it was up the river."

A look of alarm immediately appeared on the face of the other, and he shot a quick glance around.

But there wasn't any cause for alarm; the crowd was hurrying by, each man intent on his own business, and none of them paying any attention to the two who sat on the bench.

"Up the river?" said the stranger after quite a long pause.

"Yes, that is what I said."

"Well, I don't know," the man observed, evidently not easy in his mind.

Put on your thinking-cap, and try real hard, and I think you will remember!"

"Up the river?"

"Yes!"

"There are a good many places up the river," the other said, slowly.

"Yes, that is true; no doubt about that. But, as far as I know, there is only one big boarding-house up there."

"A boarding-house?"

"Yes, where they don't charge anything for lodgings and grub, and are so extremely afraid the boarders may forget to come back that mighty few of them are ever allowed to go outside the walls."

"Oh, I guess you mean Sing Sing," and the stranger tried to look innocent and unconcerned.

"Yes, Sing Sing Prison is the big boarding-house I mean, and that is where I met you."

The man was evidently disturbed by this decided announcement, and surveyed the disguised detective for a few moments in a scrutinizing way, a perplexed expression upon his face.

"Well, it may be possible that you have seen me before," he remarked, slowly. "But I will be hanged if I remember to have ever met you."

"Oh, I suppose I have got a little advantage of you, but the matter is easily explained," the other replied. "You are quite a distinguished man, while I am one of the small fry. My name is Joe Black, and I was sent up the river because I was fool enough to get mixed up with a chap who made a living by 'shoving the queer'—counterfeit money, you know. I never was very sharp, and I had no notion that the fellow was anything but what he pretended to be. He played me for a flat in the slickest manner; made out that he was a cattleman from the West who had come to New York to see about some stock he had shipped, and so when he showed a big roll of bills, I hadn't any suspicion that there was anything wrong."

"Yes, that is the way the sharpers always play the game!" the stranger exclaimed, with a half-groan. "They pick up some easy, good-natured man and make a scapegoat of him. I know how the thing is worked. It is the old story of the monkey using the cat to pull the chestnuts out of the fire."

"You are right! That is the game, every time!" the disguised detective assented. "That is the way the trick was worked with me. This Western chap pretended to take a great fancy to me, and said he needed just such a man as I was on his ranch to keep his books and look after the money, a sort of confidential man of business, you know, and I bit at the bait without the least suspicion that there was anything wrong about the matter. The chap fixed the thing up as slick as you please. I passed the counterfeit

bills while he remained in the background, and took the good money which I got in change, but finally I struck a man who was a good judge of money, and then I came to grief."

"Yes, I understand the whole business just as well as though I had been mixed up in the affair!" the stranger declared, in a tone of bitterness.

"When you were arrested and told your story no one would believe you."

"You are right! I was in the worst kind of a trap. It was of no use for me to protest that I did not know the bills were bad and that I was the innocent dupe of a designing scoundrel. No one credited the tale. It was the old story, everybody said, and so I was railroaded into Sing Sing in short order. Being caught red-handed, as you might say, the jury did not deliberate long over my case, but made short work out of it, and that is the way I happened to see you in Sing Sing. You have changed a good deal since that time, but I have a good memory for faces and after I looked at you for awhile I came to the conclusion that you were the man who used to be called Red Jim McGorgle."

The stranger uttered a groan and then shook his head in a dismal way.

"Ah, that name has caused me a deal of trouble ever since it was fastened to me!" he declared. "You see, my hair and beard used to be a sandy-red in color, and as I was considerable of a sport going around a great deal with the boys, I got this nick-name. It is a great fashion among sporting men, you know, to give each other nick-names."

"Yes, I know it. Let me see, you were sent up for housebreaking, wasn't you?"

"Correct! that was what I was nailed for, and as my name was a dead give away for me I didn't stand any chance when I came to be tried. Then too, the evidence against me was strong, although I was only a tool in the hands of other men."

"You see my story is just about the same as yours. I am a locksmith by trade, and, though I say it myself, I am as good a workman as can be found in New York. I am a bit of an inventor too and although I have never got up anything that amounted to much, yet some little tools which I contrived were thought to be pretty good things, but when I got to running around with these sporting men I neglected my business and it soon went to the dogs."

"Well, a man cannot serve two masters," the disguised detective declared in an oracular way.

"There's never was a truer thing said!" the other assented. "But I was a fool, just as a hundred other men have been. The races were my ruin; I thought I was a good judge of horses, and being lucky enough to make some good hits at first I believed I was on the high road to fortune."

"My shop used to bring me in eighteen or twenty dollars a week clear money, and as I had only a small family, a wife and a single little girl, I put by something every week, but in an evil hour I went with some of my sporting friends to the races, and on my first visit was fortunate. I came home with a couple hundred dollars in my pocket."

"And your good luck turned your head, I suppose?"

"You are right, it did!" Red Jim declared, emphatically. "I argued that it would be foolish for me to work hard six days in the week to make twenty or twenty-five dollars when by following the races I could make a couple of hundred a day."

"Yes, that is the way a man generally figures the thing out, but, as a rule, it doesn't usually take long for him to discover that he cannot pull the money in as fast as he believed."

"That was my experience, and it is strange how hard it is for a man to get his eyes opened to the truth," the other remarked.

"There is a fascination about the matter which dazzles the senses, and a victim seldom realizes that he is in the toils until ruin stares him in the face."

"I traveled that road! and not until my money was all gone, and I found myself pushed to get enough to live on, did I come to the conclusion that I did not know as much about horses as I believed."

"My shop had gone to the dogs for I had neglected it, and my customers, being tired of waiting for a man upon whom no dependence could be placed, had taken their trade to other men who were eager for it."

"Yes, that is always the way!" the disguised detective declared. "When a man once gets fairly started on the down-hill road, everybody seems to be anxious to give him a push to help him along."

"In this hour of trouble some of my sporting friends came to see me. I did not know much about them, for they were men whose acquaintance I had made on the race-track. They were jolly fellows, always seemed to have plenty of money, and were not at all afraid of spending their cash."

"It did not take them long to find out just how I was situated, and when in my desperation I declared I was ready to do almost anything to make a little money, one of them said that he knew a certain party of a rather shady

reputation, who would be willing to give a big price if he could get a good workman like myself, to get up certain peculiar tools for him."

"I understand—a burglar's kit?"

"Yes, that was what the man wanted. A set of tools made of the finest steel, and jointed in sections so as to be carried in a carpet-bag."

"I have heard that tools of that kind cost a lot of money."

"Oh, yes, they do, for they must be made of the best material and no one but a first-class workman can get them up, and men of that kind are not willing to do such work, even if they can get a big price for it, for very few men care to run the risk of getting into trouble by doing such work."

"You were in just the condition though to listen to the voice of the tempter."

"Very true. This was not the first time, mind you, that I had been sounded in regard to doing such work, but I had always scorned the proposal. In this instance though I was weak enough to listen to the offer and after a while I made a bargain to get up the tools. This brought me in contact with some of the greatest crooks in the country; men who stood at the very top."

"King-pin rascals, in fact," the other added. "Fellows who despised any little affair, and would not go into any scheme unless there was big money to be made."

"Yes, that is just the kind of men I fell in with," Red Jim remarked. "They had plenty of money, paid like princes and nothing was ever too good or too expensive for them."

"Just the sort of men to make a man believe that there wasn't much truth in the old saying that honesty is the best policy," Joe Phenix observed.

"Yes, that is true, and these fellows caught at the idea that a man like myself should suffer for the want of money when I could make plenty by doing a little crooked work."

"And when a man is reduced to the last extremity such an argument appeals very powerfully to him."

"Indeed it does!" Red Jim exclaimed. "I listened to the voice of the tempter, and at last agreed to do the work. This delighted my friends, and, in the most liberal manner, one of them insisted upon my taking twenty dollars in advance."

"They wanted to secure you," the disguised detective remarked. "Your skill as a locksmith rendered you extremely valuable to them and they had made up their minds that it would pay them to go to some extra trouble in order to get you to do their work."

"Oh, yes, that was their game, of course, and they played it so well that they captured me, although I knew I was making a fool of myself when I agreed to their proposal," the other remarked, with a deep sigh.

"I got up their tools for them, and they were highly delighted, paying me the compliment of saying that they were the best set they had ever seen. Then the next thing I did was to make a lot of skeleton keys, and they were fully as delighted with the second job as they had been with the first."

"These fellows, too, had got me into the habit of drinking freely, so that I spent the money which I got from them about as fast as I received it."

"They did not want you to get ahead," the other observed. "Having got you in their clutches they proposed to hold on to you."

"Oh, yes, that was the idea, undoubtedly. I was just the man they wanted. As I told you in the beginning, I am just about as good a workman in my line as you can scare up anywhere, and for years the study of locks has been a sort of hobby of mine, independent of its being a part of my trade. In fact, I had become so expert in that particular line that it was a boast of mine that the lock had not been invented which I could not pick inside of five hours."

"You are just the kind of a man that these crooks were looking for," Joe declared. "A man possessed of a gift of that kind would be invaluable to them."

"Very true, and it was not long before they began to try and coax me to go in with them. They argued in this way: What was the use of my being contented to make twenty dollars every now and then when by a single stroke I could secure two or three thousand without any trouble."

"Well, to a man situated as you were, who had commenced to tread the dark, winding and dangerous path of the crook, such an argument undoubtedly seemed very powerful."

"Oh, yes, after a man once gets started it is an easy matter for him to be led on. In all such matters it is the first step that counts. After that is taken, it is about as easy to go on as to come to a dead stop."

"I held out for about a month and then I yielded to the temptation and agreed to go in with the gang."

"There were three in the party, and they said that if I would join them, in consideration of my skill in my line, they would give a quarter of the boodle, although they explained that it was not usual to allow a new man an equal share with the old ones."

"They did their best to get you to go into the scheme."

"Yes, for they knew that I would be valuable. The gang had their eyes on a job which they anticipated would yield a rich return. It was a country bank, and the bank itself was poorly guarded, for the bank people relied upon their safe which was one of the newest makes and provided with all sorts of modern improvements. In fact, the makers were so confident that they had got up a superior article that they proudly proclaimed it was burglar proof and could defy the skill of the smartest safe-breakers in the country."

"Well, I believe that nearly all the big safe-makers claim the same, but I would hate to put a thousand dollar bill inside any of the safes with the announcement that it could be taken by the man able to get at it," the disguised detective observed, dryly.

"Yes, so would I, for it is my experience—and I claim to know as much about locks and safes as any man in the country—that the ingenuity of man cannot construct a lock which cannot be picked, or a safe that a skillful workman can't smash."

"I have no doubt about that," Joe Phenix remarked. "For that assumption is in line with the universal law that it is easier to tear down than it is to build up."

"That is so," the other observed, thoughtfully. "No doubt about the truth of that, although I never reasoned it out in that way."

"Well, I went in with the crooks and agreed to try my best to pick the lock of the safe for them. It had been their idea when they first thought of attempting to crack the bank to smash the safe in the usual way by the use of the blow-pipe and tools, aided by a charge of powder, but there was a great risk in performing this operation, for the bank was in a thickly-settled neighborhood, so there was a big chance that the safe could not be muffled sufficiently to deaden the noise of the explosion, and the sound would be apt to rouse the neighborhood."

"I see! and if anything of the kind happened, it would upset the scheme."

"Exactly, and that was the reason why they were so anxious to get me into the job," the other remarked.

"They had formed a high opinion of my skill, and believed I could get the safe open by picking the lock."

"Well, I went into the job, and managed to do the trick, although it was a difficult one."

"Before I tackled this safe I did not believe that there was a lock in existence which would bother me for over five or six hours, but this lock was the best one I had ever met. We selected Saturday night, so as to have all the time possible, and started in to work about eleven o'clock."

"It was in the winter time, and as it wasn't light until about seven in the morning, it gave me about eight hours, and it took me nearly the whole of the time to do the job."

"And you succeeded at last, eh?" the disguised detective exclaimed, appearing to take the greatest possible interest in the story.

"Yes, but we were amazingly disappointed with the haul," the locksmith replied. "We confidently expected to catch all the way from twenty to fifty thousand dollars, but we only got about five, and after the expenses were taken out we had about twelve hundred dollars apiece."

"That was pretty good!"

"Well, I thought so, but when a detective arrested me ten days afterwards, I changed my mind. I was tried, convicted, and sent to Sing Sing, thanks to the detective, Joe Phenix!"

CHAPTER XIV. A SUGGESTION.

"JOE PHENIX was the man who nailed you, eh?" the disguised detective asked, speaking with perfect freedom, for he was confident that his companion had no suspicions that he was anything but what he pretended to be.

"Yes, he is the man who sent me to Sing Sing. The bank people put him on the case, and he secured all four of us who were in the job, so, you see, the money we got did not do us much good."

"I have heard of this detective, and understand that he has a pretty good reputation as a man-hunter."

"Oh, yes, the crooks have more fear of him than of any other man in the business."

"I suppose that as this Joe Phenix is responsible for your being sent up the river that you will try to get an opportunity to square the account with him?" the detective suggested, his idea being to find out just how the man felt about the matter.

The locksmith shook his head.

"Oh, no, I don't bear him any malice. He only did his duty," Red Jim replied. "I would have done the same if I had been in his place, and I must say too that he treated me in the kindest manner. He took pains to go out of his way to make things easy for me, for he said he was sure I was a new hand at the business, no old crook, and was sorry to be obliged to put me behind the bars. In fact, talked to me just like an old friend, and gave me a lot of good advice,

too, but at the time I was a little suspicious in regard to his motives and so didn't respond to his advances."

"That was the work of my pals, you know," the man explained. "As soon as we were arrested they sent for their lawyer, and his advice was to keep a stiff upper lip, for he declared that a case could not be made out against us if we didn't give ourselves away."

"After you were convicted though I suppose you came to the conclusion that the lawyer did not know quite so much as he pretended?"

"Yes, I was struck all in a heap on the day of the trial when I saw how strong the evidence was, and when the jury retired, I felt in my bones that there wasn't any chance for us."

"I have no doubt that your pals put the lawyer up to advising you that there wasn't any danger," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Very likely. After I got to Sing Sing, when I had plenty of time to reflect upon the matter, I came to that conclusion."

"You were a green hand, you see, and your pals were afraid that you might go back on them and turn State's evidence."

"Yes, I suppose so; I thought of that. Up at Sing Sing, you know, there are plenty of old birds who know the ropes and don't mind speaking their minds freely."

"As I told you, the detective talked to me in such a way as to open my eyes, and after my conviction I made up my mind that if I lived to come out of the prison that I would lead such a life there would not be any danger of my getting into any such trouble again, but when I told some of my fellow-jail-birds of my determination they shook their heads."

"They had their doubts of your being able to live up to the resolution?"

"Yes, every man talked that way the first time he was sent up they said; hardly a man but what swore that he would never break the laws again, but after he got out and found how hard it was for him to gain an honest living, he was mighty apt to try the old game again."

"There is no doubt that there is a great deal of truth in the statement," the disguised detective observed, reflectively. "There is an old saying that necessity knows no law, and if a man finds that he cannot gain a living by honest work, he must be made of stout stuff indeed if he does not yield to temptation if he is subject to it."

"That is true enough, and then when a man comes out of State's Prison a brand is upon him, and he finds that it is not an easy matter for him to get work, for the fact that he is a jail-bird is pretty sure to leak out. And it is wonderful, too, how the thing becomes known, for in my own case I went among strangers, to a part of the city where no one knew me, but, somehow, it was discovered that the taint of a jail was on me and I got the sack."

"I know how that is by personal experience," the other declared; "I have been all through that, and it was my idea that some of the men who had been my pals were responsible for it."

The locksmith shook his head in a mournful way.

"Well, I don't know about that," he said, slowly. "I don't mind telling you that the same idea has occurred to me, but I haven't got any proof to go upon."

"In my case I feel pretty sure that I have not made any mistake about the matter," the other asserted. "My pals did not like to have me give them the shake, as they called it. They were so wedded to a life of crime that they did not care to reform, and they did not want me to lead an honest life, for in that case they could not count on my assistance in any of their schemes, so they did their best, not only to induce me to go in with them again, but to fix it so that I would not be able to make my bread by honest toil."

"It may be that some such game has been worked on me, but I cannot say for certain that it is so; one thing is sure though, and that is that my pals are dreadful anxious for me to join them again. They argue that the chances are a hundred to one that if I join with them in another scheme we will be able to pull it off successfully. They say that it was only through a combination of extremely unfortunate occurrences that we were so unlucky as to be nabbed on the last occasion."

"Oh, yes, that is always the cry!" Joe Phenix declared. "There never was a general who lost a battle yet who could not tell after the fight exactly what fatal mistake he had made, and who did not declare that he would never make the same blunder again, and yet when the next struggle came he made out no better than before. It all goes on the old saying that a man's foresight is not as good as his hindsight."

"Well, I have not got the confidence now in the judgment of these men that I used to have," the locksmith remarked. "And when they assure me that we can't make a failure next time, but will be sure to win a big stake, I do not feel certain that it will turn out that way, but I am so situated that I don't know what else I can do."

"That is bad," Joe Phenix observed in a sympathizing way.

"Yes, the outlook ahead for me is anything but good," the locksmith remarked in a very disconsolate tone. "You see, the wife and child were left in a terrible bad way when I was sent to Sing Sing, for I wasn't wise enough to hide away the plunder I obtained, as my pals did, and when I was arrested the officers gobbled up about all of it. I had given the wife a little, which she put away, and this kept her and my little girl until she was able to get work. She is not a strong woman though, and had a hard struggle to support herself, but she managed to pull through and now she is working away as hard as ever; but I can see that she is gradually failing and will not be able to keep up the struggle much longer, so I must get enough to support the family in some way, and if I cannot do it by honest means then I must try the life of a crook again," and the man heaved a deep sigh as he made the admission.

"Hard lines!" the disguised detective exclaimed.

"You can bet your life that it is!" the other declared, emphatically. "It is all very well for men who can get work, or who have money enough to support them, to talk about how foolish it is for a man to become a crook, when all the odds are against his being able to make a living by such a life, without spending half his days in some jail; but just let these fellows be confronted by the puzzle, try honesty and starvation, or dishonesty and enough to eat, and see how many of them will be able to resist temptation."

"A good many will fall by the wayside, I think," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Yes, that is my opinion, particularly if the man has a family. I read in a newspaper the other day that some one of the big churchmen over in England said that in his opinion, if a man couldn't get work, and was starving, he was justified in stealing a loaf of bread, so as to keep life within his body, and it is my belief that that man is much nearer right than the fellows who preach that a man ought to be good, no matter if he is starving to death."

"The problem is a difficult one to solve, and it doesn't do much good to preach patience and honesty to a hungry man."

"You are right, it doesn't!" the locksmith exclaimed.

"Now, just take my own case," he continued. "I came out of Sing Sing with the firm determination never to again do anything wrong, and up to the present time I have lived right up to the resolution, but now that I am about at the end of my rope I weaken. I can't see my wife and child starve, and if I can't get enough to support them in an honest way, then I must try a life of crime again."

"Well, it would be an easy matter for a man who is well-fixed and free from care, to declare that you ought not to do it—that you ought to be honest, even if you are compelled to see your wife and child starve as well as yourself, but you can't cure hunger by means of an argument upon the beauties of honesty; in such a case a good square meal is worth all the talk in the world."

"You are right!" Red Jim declared. "And though I have held out like a major yet I am going to weaken now."

"Well, mortal man cannot blame you, but the only thing is to be careful how you go ahead. Be sure that the snap is a good one before you go into it," the disguised detective warned.

"Oh, you can trust me to keep my eyes open!" the locksmith exclaimed. "I think that this little experience of mine has put me up to a thing or two and I shall be mighty careful not to go into any scheme that is very risky."

"Well, you would be very foolish if you did, but if I were you I would not put too much faith in these pals, for although I don't know anything about the matter, and so am only guessing at the truth, yet it looks to me as if they were the men who gave out the fact that you had done time at Sing Sing."

"I am a little suspicious about that fact myself, particularly as they have all laughed at the idea that a man of my genius at lock-picking should be content with the paltry earnings of a trade, when by a single bold stroke of crooked business I stand a chance to make as much money in a single night as I could hope to get by two or three years of plodding toil at the work-bench."

"Yes, but there is the risk of getting caught, with the State Prison in the background, to be taken into account," Joe Phenix observed.

"I did not fail to have that point noted in the argument, but my pals attempted to get around it by saying that one swallow did not make a summer, and that because I was nabbed once was no sign that the bloodhounds would catch me again."

"That is true, of course, but you have got to run the risk of such a thing happening, while if you did not do any crooked work, there would not be any chance of your getting into trouble."

"That is exactly what I told them, and then they got angry and let fall some threats to the effect that if I knew when I was well off I would not attempt to throw them overboard."

"And what did you say?"

"I gave them as good as they sent!" the lock-

smith exclaimed, spiritedly. "I am just in that state of mind, you know, that I don't care much whether I live or die, and if it wasn't for the wife and little one I think I would about as lief be out of the world as in it."

"I can understand just how you feel."

"And when these crooks discovered that I could not be bullied they changed their tune and tried to make out that they were only joking, but I knew better than that, you know."

"Then they went on another tack; there was a friend of theirs who needed just such a man as I was to aid him in a little scheme which he was working, and they said they were sure that if I would go into the game I would be able to make a good thing out of it and the risk was small."

"And being so hard pushed I suppose you were willing to meet the party and give him a chance to explain?"

"Yes, and that is what I am here for," the locksmith replied. I was instructed how to give the signal with a newspaper, and my man ought to have made his appearance some time ago."

"I judged from the way you acted when you came up that you took me to be the party," the disguised detective remarked.

"Yes, I did, for I thought you were a stranger, as at first I did not remember you at all, but now that we have had a talk, the impression comes to me that I have seen you before, but it is very vague and indistinct."

"I believe that you are a man who can be trusted although you are weak enough to be led into temptation," Joe Phenix observed, abruptly.

Red Jim stared at his companion, surprised by the speech.

"Well, I don't know," he said, slowly, and evidently perplexed by the words of the other.

"I always had the reputation of being a man who could be depended upon, but since this Sing Sing business I will be hanged if I know whether I ought to say I can be trusted or not."

"Oh, I don't think that little affair ought to make any difference," the disguised detective remarked. "One thing is certain: you showed that you were true blue by sticking to your pals. If you had turned State's evidence it would have made your sentence much lighter."

"Yes, I know that. Some of the detectives tried to get me to squeal, as they termed it, and when I told them that I did not care to play that kind of a game, they declared that I was a fool to stick to men who would betray me in a moment if they could make anything by it."

"But as I understand the matter it was not possible for them to gain anything by preaching. They were old hands who had been behind the bars a dozen times, and the authorities were not disposed to let up on that. In your case it was different; you were a new man, and they were inclined to give you a chance."

"Yes, and I am sorry now that I did not accept the offer, although I could not have given much information, for my pals were careful not to allow me to discover any of their secrets."

"You were a new man, you see, and new men are never trusted by the old hands."

"That is natural, and these fellows that I was with were old stagers who were up to all sorts of tricks."

"Well, I am going to trust you, even if your pals didn't, although I don't know much about you," the disguised detective declared. "When I went up the river it was for life, and that I am not behind the bars now is due to a fortunate accident. I should, undoubtedly, have lived and died in Sing Sing if the authorities had not picked me out as being likely to be of service to them in a certain case."

"Ah, yes, I see," Red Jim observed, and then he fell to studying the face of the other in an attentive way.

"I accepted the offer made to me, and had the good luck to be successful, so, from that time I have been a man-hunter."

"Yes, I understand, and I know who you are now," the locksmith remarked. "I was a little doubtful about you from the beginning. I knew that your face was familiar, but I couldn't remember to have ever met you before."

"You see, that your disguise is so perfect that I did not recognize you, but I do now though, for your words have helped to open my eyes."

"You are Joe Phenix!"

"Yes, I am the man."

"Well, I am glad that I met you, for I feel satisfied that I can depend upon every word you say, and if you can tell me any way by means of which I can make an honest living I shall be heartily glad of it."

"Would you be willing to try the life of a secret agent—to become a man-hunter, a police spy?"

"I haven't any objection. I do not feel well-disposed toward the men who tempted me into a life of crime, for if it had not been for them I never would have known what the inside of a prison was. I have my suspicions too that, as you suggested, these crooks are the men who started the gossip about my being a jail-bird."

"Hardly a doubt of it!" the detective declared.

"Your skill as a locksmith rendered you valuable to them and they were not willing that you should return to the path of honesty,

and so they took steps to fix it so that you would have to lead a crooked life."

"When you come to examine this matter closely you will see that these men are responsible for your downfall," Joe Phenix continued.

"If it had not been for them you never would have been led into temptation. It was all a deliberate plan on their part. Your mechanical skill rendered you a desirable man and they coolly went to work to get you into their power."

"And the scoundrels succeeded too!" the other exclaimed. "And if I had not happened to meet you, just by accident, I should have been compelled to follow the life of a crook in order to be able to live."

"Well, I can give you a new field in which to operate, and I will guarantee that you will make enough to support your family in comfort, and if you have any genius for the life, it will not be long before you can command a good salary," Joe Phenix remarked.

"I want to enroll you on my private staff," the detective continued. "I am not in public life now—not employed by the authorities, you understand, but acting for myself—a private detective."

"That fact was not known to me, but it does not make any difference. In fact, I would much rather deal with you directly than with the police authorities, for I know you are a man upon whom I can depend."

"Yes, I think my reputation bears out that statement. No man who kept faith with me ever had reason to complain that I did not keep faith with him."

"You have given me a chance, and you will find that I will do my best to deserve any trust which may be reposed in me!" the locksmith declared.

"Now, about this little game in which they want you to take a hand? Do you know anything in regard to it?"

"No; all that was said to me about the matter was that the parties needed a man like myself, and I could make a good stake by going into the scheme, for the game was a big one."

"Well, my curiosity has been excited, and I would like to know what the fellows are driving at, so when the party comes you must introduce me as an old pal—a man who was your room-mate at Sing Sing, and declare you will not go into the thing unless I am given a chance, too."

"Yes, I see. Oh, you can depend upon my doing the business up in fine shape!" Red Jim declared. "I am not particularly interested in the matter, but when I strike any scheme of this kind, I always make it a rule to find out all I can about the affair, for there is no telling when knowledge of this sort will prove useful."

"That is true."

"But I want you for a particular scheme which I am working," the detective explained. "I am forming a band of secret agents for the accomplishment of a certain purpose, and these agents I am introducing into the service of one of the great men of the metropolis, some in his house and others in his down-town office."

"Ah, yes, that is a good idea."

"What could you do?"

"Let me see!" said the other, in a reflective way. "A locksmith would not be of any use to him, of course, and I have no knowledge of bookkeeping, so I could not do anything in that line. I might take a position as light porter, or messenger."

Joe Phenix shook his head.

"I don't think I could use you in the office," he said. "Some of the Wall street detectives would be sure to recognize you, and then the intimation that you must get out of that neighborhood would speedily follow. I must put you in the house up-town."

"Oh, well, I suppose I could manage to get along as a waiter or something of that sort," the locksmith remarked. "I haven't any experience, but then I am naturally quick to pick up anything, and I think I could succeed in giving satisfaction."

"I have no doubt of it, and as there are eight or ten servants in the house, I will be able to arrange something for you."

Just at this point a thick-set, elderly man, with iron-gray hair, and rather poorly dressed, sauntered by the bench upon which the two sat.

As he passed he cast a piercing glance at the pair.

Joe Phenix waited until the man passed out of earshot and then remarked:

"That is the party whom you are to meet, I think."

"Yes, I shouldn't be surprised. But he hasn't given the signal."

"My presence here bothers him probably, and he is a little uncertain as to whether it is safe for him to go ahead or not," the detective observed.

"Now your game is to declare that I am your pal, and say you will not do any business unless I am let into the scheme."

"I understand, and you can rely upon my playing my part right up to the hilt."

By this time the stranger had turned around and was slowly approaching the bench.

"My name is Joe Black, you know, your

room-mate at Sing Sing, and all around workman, who is not particular what he turns his hand to so long as he stands a chance to make a good stake!" Joe Phenix said, hastily, as the man approached.

The detective anticipated that the stranger was going to speak to them, but he was not correct in his surmise, for the man went by without taking any notice of them.

"It is ware hawk," the detective observed. "He is evidently suspicious and is not disposed to say anything to you as long as I am present."

"Yes, it certainly looks like it."

"I had better get out then, for it is apparent that we cannot work the trick the way I suggested," Joe Phenix remarked. "This fellow is too fly, and an attempt to bring me into the affair would probably upset the whole business."

"He is evidently a cautious customer."

"Yes, a wary fish who must be carefully played or else we will never be able to land him. I will get out so as to give him a chance to talk to you, for I don't believe he will say a word while there is anybody around."

"He is not taking any chances, you see."

"Do you know Pat O'Donnell's saloon on Houston street?"

This place was a noted resort of crooks and bad men generally.

"Oh, yes, I have often been there with my pals," the locksmith replied. "It was in Pat's place that we planned the robbery of the bank."

"I will go there and wait until you come," the detective remarked, rising. "And if anything should happen to detain you, and I am not there when you arrive, sit down and wait for me."

"All right! I will be on hand, and you can depend upon my doing my best to aid you! You have given me a chance for my life, and I am going to do all in my power to deserve the trust!" Red Jim declared.

"I am not at all afraid that you will not come up to the mark!" the detective asserted. "Because you were foolish enough to follow the wrong road for a while is no reason why you cannot turn out and take another path when your eyes are opened to the fact that you have made a mistake."

"That is so, and you can bet your life that I will never make such a mistake again if I have any choice in the matter!"

"I trust you, and if you keep faith with me you will find that it will be the making of you!" the detective declared as he took his departure.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PROPOSAL.

THE detective sauntered away in the careless fashion common to men who have nothing in particular to do, and upon whose hands the time hangs heavy, and as he passed out of the Park he cast a careless glance behind him with the idea of seeing what the gray-haired stranger was doing; as he anticipated, the man had halted and was attentively watching his movements.

"It is all right," Joe Phenix muttered. "Now that I am gone he will come forward and proceed to business."

"It is not likely that it will amount to anything—that is, that it will turn out to be a case in which I would care to interest myself, but it will be a good test of my new man's ability, and also show me whether I can trust him or not, but if I am any judge of mankind there is not much doubt about the matter."

Then the detective went on his way, taking a car for down-town; his idea being to fill up the time for about an hour, for he anticipated that it would be fully that length of time before the locksmith came to the saloon.

Joe Phenix was right in his conjecture that the stranger was waiting to get an opportunity to speak to the locksmith in private, for as soon as the detective's form was lost amid the people hurrying along the street, the gray-haired man came up and took a seat upon the bench by Red Jim's side.

"This is a nice day," the stranger observed, casting a glance at the folded newspaper which the locksmith had arranged for a signal.

"Yes, pretty fair for this time of year."

Then the stranger took an envelope from his pocket and folded it up in exactly the same way as Red Jim had the newspaper.

"Do you know what that means?" the gray-haired man asked.

"Oh, yes, you are the party whom I was to meet here. My name is McGorgle."

"And mine is Oaks—John Oaks."

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Oaks; the more so because I have been told that you needed the aid of a man like myself, and could put me in for a good job."

"Well, that depends upon certain things," the other replied, studying the face of the locksmith attentively.

"In the first place, are you true blue—can you be trusted?"

"You must take me to be a precious flat if you think I would be green enough to tell you that I could not be trusted!" the locksmith replied. "Did you ever yet meet a man who wasn't ready to swear that he could be depended upon, no matter in what situation he might be placed?"

"I suppose you are right about that," the other remarked, in a reflective way. "I presume there are few men who would be willing to give themselves away by admitting that they cannot be trusted."

"They would show themselves to be idiots if they did," Red Jim declared. "But, I say, it is not possible that you have gone into the affair without taking the trouble to find out just what kind of a man I am? You have had a talk with my pals, and they have undoubtedly posted you as to whether I can be trusted or not."

"Of course I have had a talk with them, and they give you a first-class recommendation."

"They couldn't do anything else and speak the truth!" the locksmith declared.

"But who was that party with you?" the stranger asked, abruptly. "It seems to me that it was rather foolish for you to bring an outsider along with you when keeping an appointment of this kind."

"Oh, he wasn't any outsider, but an old-time crook, and as good an all-round cracksmen as can be found on this side of the water!" Red Jim declared.

"Is that so?" the other asked, evidently suspicious.

"Yes, yes; he was my room-mate at Sing Sing; Joe Black is his name, and he is one of the old-timers. I happened to meet him here just by accident, and it is the first time I have seen him since I came from up the river. Joe is in hard luck, you see, and when I let on to him that I was thinking of going into a scheme where there was a chance to make a big stake he asked me to try and ring him in too, so if you have any opening for a first-class workman, who can do as good a job as any other man in the country, I hope you will bear Joe in mind."

The stranger shook his head and a dissatisfied look appeared on his face.

"I don't think that you were wise to say anything of the kind to this man!" he declared. "It is always the best policy to keep your tongue between your teeth in all such matters. The least said is the soonest mended, you know."

"Oh, yes, I know that, but Joe is all right; no doubt about that!" Red Jim asserted.

"How can you tell certain in regard to that?" the stranger demanded. "Because he was with you in Sing Sing is no sign that he is all right now."

"Yes, that is true, but I don't believe there is much doubt about it."

"But it is policy for every man to play as safe a game as he possibly can!" the other declared. "Things are so mighty uncertain nowadays that a man can not afford to throw a chance away."

"That is so, I suppose."

"How can you tell that this Joe Black has not become a stool-pigeon in the pay of the police? There are dozens of men who have done time up the river who are now acting as police spies, and a man is never safe in trusting his secrets to any one."

"Oh, I know that, and you can rely upon me to keep my business to myself, although I don't believe there is any harm in Joe."

"Anyhow, I did not say enough to him to amount to anything," the locksmith continued after a moment's reflection. "But if I do succeed in making a stake I can't go back on Joe, you know, for he is an old pal, and I always found him right up to the mark in every way."

"Oh, that is all right!" the stranger exclaimed. "I don't blame you for sticking to your old pal, but don't give anything away to him. If you succeed in making a stake and choose to give him a share of it, well and good, but there isn't any need of your allowing him to know just how you got the money."

"I will keep the thing quiet—you can depend upon that!" Red Jim asserted. "But just work in Joe if there is any chance for a good man."

"Very well, I will bear him in mind. And now, to come down to business: you are an expert locksmith?"

"Yes, and as good a workman as you will find in my line anywhere in the country; I bar none!" Red Jim exclaimed, proudly.

"And you can not only make locks but pick them?"

"That is correct! And the lock has not been invented that I cannot pick if I am allowed sufficient time."

"It is in that line that your services are desired."

"I will fill the bill! you can depend upon that."

"The scheme is a rather complex one, and it will take considerable time to work it out."

"Oh, I understand that, a big scheme can't be hurried sometimes, and the bigger it is the slower it usually has to be worked."

"Exactly! Now, the programme will be to introduce you into the house of a certain man in this city in some humble capacity."

Despite the control which Red Jim had over his features he could not prevent a look of surprise from appearing on his face when he listened to these words, for the scheme was precisely the same that Joe Phenix had suggested.

"It can't be possible though that it can be the same man, for that would be too good a

piece of luck!" was the thought that passed rapidly through his brain.

The other noticed the expression of surprise, and, naturally, fell into an error concerning it.

"This rather astonishes you, eh?" he said.

"Yes, it is a little unexpected."

"Well, that is the way the game has got to be worked," the stranger explained. "I suppose the idea of taking a situation as a servant seems a little novel to you, but it is necessary to have you in the house so you will be able to get an opportunity to perform the work, for the common house breaking act will not answer."

"Yes, I understand! It has got to be done on the sly and will take considerable time."

"Exactly, and the trick must be worked in such a way that after the job is done it will not be possible for the smartest detective to guess how the thing was worked."

"Ah, yes; it is a mighty complex scheme I see."

"That is the idea, and it will probably take a couple of months, perhaps longer, to work the game."

"So long as I am well paid it doesn't matter to me how long it takes; a year would suit me first rate!" the locksmith observed with a chuckle.

"Now, the question is what can you do?" the other observed, reflectively. "You will have to enter the house as a servant, you know."

"Well, that is a puzzle," the locksmith observed. "I have never had any experience in that line, but as I am naturally pretty quick to learn I do not doubt that I can get along all right."

"The household is a big one, about a dozen servants are kept, and it will not be a difficult matter to get you into the mansion as the parties who are working this scheme have some powerful friends in the house."

"Then the trick ought to be worked easily enough."

"I think you would be able to get along as the butler's assistant, for he would instruct you in regard to your duties, and all you would have to do would be to obey his orders."

"I can do that easily enough."

Oaks produced a card and wrote a few lines upon it, then gave it to the locksmith.

"There, to-morrow morning, about nine o'clock, present that card to the footman at the door of the house, the number of which is on the card, and say you have come for the position of butler's assistant."

"All right," replied Red Jim, pocketing the card.

"After you get into the house I will find a way to communicate with you. That is all at present. Keep a still tongue in your head and you will win a big stake!"

And after this caution John Oaks departed.

CHAPTER XVI.

JOE PHENIX IS SURPRISED.

THE locksmith watched the stranger until he disappeared in the crowd, surging along by the side of the Park.

"Well, I am fairly in for it now," he murmured. "And I look upon it as a mighty funny thing, too, that this fellow is working his game in exactly the same way that the detective proposed to work his. It does not seem to be hardly possible though that it can be the same house, for that would be too big a piece of luck, altogether."

"But the detective will be able to tell the moment he puts his eyes on this card."

And then the locksmith fell into a thoughtful mood, for some puzzling ideas had come to him.

"Now the question is, how am I going to let Joe Phenix see the card without this party discovering that I am playing the cross on him," Red Jim murmured with contracted brows.

"As far as that goes, there is no need of showing him the card, for I know what is written upon it, and I can repeat it to him easily enough, but if this crook is as smart as he ought to be to attempt to work a big game of this sort, the chances are great that he has a 'shadow' on me, and that when I leave this place I will be watched."

"Now, here is where the puzzle comes in. I must throw the spy off the track, so that he will not be able to report that I went to O'Donnegal's place and met my supposed pal there, and yet I must work the trick so it will not appear as if I had any suspicion that I was being watched."

The locksmith meditated over this matter for a few moments, and then a plan came to him.

"I will go straight home," he muttered, as he rose to his feet. "On the way I will be able to find out whether I am shadowed or not, and if I am it will be an easy matter for me to evade the spy by going up to the roof and passing along to one of the houses at the end of the block, and then descend to the street."

This plan the locksmith immediately proceeded to put into execution.

Red Jim lived on Avenue A, having a room on the top floor of one of the dingy tenement-houses so common in that quarter.

The locksmith proceeded in a leisurely way, as though he was not at all in a hurry, and though, apparently, he went on as though he had no suspicions that he was followed, yet he kept a stealthy watch behind him; three separate times

he doubled on his track and went back, entering stores, where, under pretense of wanting to purchase something, he lingered for a while.

By this means he was soon able to discover that there was a slightly-built, consumptive-looking youth, who was on his track.

As soon as the locksmith satisfied himself in regard to this fact, he proceeded straight to his house.

Red Jim went in through the open doorway, around which a group of dirty-faced children were clustered, and went up a flight of stairs, then, as an idea came to him, he descended to the main entry again and went through a rear door leading into a beer saloon which occupied the first floor of the house.

Through the transparent screen which half-covered the window of the saloon, Red Jim was able to get a view of the spy lounging by the front door.

Then an accident occurred of which the locksmith was quick to take advantage.

A horse fell down in the street and a crowd gathered immediately.

The spy could not resist the temptation to join with the rest in advising the driver how to get the beast up, and the moment he left his post Red Jim glided into the street, and soon was beyond the vision of the shadow.

Away he hurried for the low drinking saloon in Houston street.

O'Donnegal's dive was well known to the detectives as one of the worst dens in the city, but as the owner was "solid" with the police—he was an ex-alderman and a power in politics—it was but seldom that he was troubled by the authorities, although it was understood that his saloon was the chosen resort of some of the worst crooks to be found in all the metropolis.

The interior of the saloon did not differ materially from the average corner drinking houses which are so common in the city, excepting that in place of the usual rear apartment, generally dignified by the title of reading-room, there were four small box-like apartments for the accommodation of customers.

When a party took possession of one of these rooms and closed the door, a private conference could be held without danger of the conversation being overheard if the speakers were careful to speak in a low tone of voice.

Joe Phenix made his appearance in the saloon about three quarters of an hour after the time when he had parted with the locksmith in Union Square.

The detective was well acquainted with O'Donnegal's den.

A half a dozen times he had gone into the saloon and snapped the bracelets on the wrist of some crook who was "wanted" and, as a rule, had taken his man out at the muzzle of the revolver, for there was usually a tough gang in the saloon and it was a point of honor with them to make common cause against a fly cop when an arrest was threatened.

But the reader who has followed the fortunes of Joe Phenix—who has read the tales in which the mighty man-hunter plays so prominent a part, knows that the detective was a man who did not seem to understand the meaning of the word, fear.

He held his life as carelessly as though lives were to be had for the asking.

Single-handed and alone he usually nailed his men, no matter how great were the odds, and this cool bravado had such an effect upon the bad men of the city that there were few of them who cared to test the prowess of the bloodhound, no matter how great was the advantage they possessed in point of numbers.

As the reader will understand, Joe Phenix, owing to these circumstances, was as well known in the crooks' den as any detective in the city, and yet he walked into the place, confident that his disguise would prevent him from being recognized, as coolly as though he had never dragged a felon from its shelter.

There was a half a dozen beetle-browed, evil-looking fellows in the saloon, and they glared in a suspicious way at the detective as he entered.

All of the party were crooks, and some of them were men who had been concerned in so many crimes that whenever they saw a stranger the apprehension seized upon them that it might be an officer of the law in search of them, and others, being birds of prey, always on the lookout for a victim, invariably surveyed each new-comer with a view to seeing if a "stake" could not be "won" out of him.

Joe Phenix advanced into the saloon and proceeded to the bar, casting a peculiar, hesitating glance around as he did so, playing the part of a crook, entering a strange place, and a little afraid that he might be running into a snare, to the life.

"A glass of ale," he said, to the bartender, a big, brawny fellow, with a ferociously black mustache.

The detective had great faith in his disguise, or else he never would have ventured to accost the bartender, for he had given that worthy a lesson on the first occasion when he had essayed to take a man out of the dive which would be certain to make the barkeeper remember him to his dying day.

Joe Phenix had surprised his man, deftly snapped the handcuffs upon him, and the bartender, amazed that a single man should dare to make an arrest in the saloon, had come to the rescue of the prisoner with a club.

The detective parried with his left arm the blow aimed at his head, and with his iron-like right fist smote the bartender between the eyes, the stroke knocking him into a corner of the saloon, heels over head, and by the time the fellow recovered from the effect of the blow Joe Phenix had his prisoner out on the sidewalk and, with leveled revolver, was marching him through the crowd, none of whom dared to interfere with the bold invader, although the fellows on the outskirts of the crowd called out loudly to "kill the cop," but none of them cared to attempt to perform the feat.

The bartender drew the ale and favored the disguised detective with a scrutinizing glance as he placed the glass before him on the counter.

Joe Phenix passed over a nickel, and as he did so said:

"Red Jim McGorgle been in lately?"

"Don't know as I know the gent," the bartender remarked, evidently suspicious of the stranger.

"Oh, I guess you do," the detective replied, beginning to sip the ale. "You needn't be afraid to give the thing away to me, you know, for I am all right. I was with Red Jim up the river; he and me were room-mates." The disguised bloodhound spoke in a confidential tone. "My name is Joe Black. Maybe you have heard Red Jim speak of me, for we are old pals, you know."

The austere manner of the bartender changed, and a good-natured grin appeared on his countenance.

"Well, now, come to think of it, I believe I do know a gent by the name of Red Jim, but I hain't seen him for some time," the man behind the counter observed.

"His right name is Jim McGorgle," the supposed crook remarked.

"Yes, that is the man, and he used to come in here pretty often—make it his regular stamping ground, you know, but I don't remember to have seen him for a dog's age."

"I ain't playing in the best of luck now," the disguised detective observed, leaning over the counter and becoming very confidential. "I happened to run across Red Jim, and when I let on to him how I was fixed he said that, maybe, he could put me on to something, and told me to meet him here. I am a good man, you know, and can take a trick as well as any cove that ever tried it, but my pals that I used to work with ain't to the fore now, and it is a hard job for a man to turn up anything alone, no matter how downey a cove he may be."

"Oh, yes, I know that," the bartender responded with the air of a man who considered that he was an authority. But I say, sport, while I ain't saying anything ag'in' Red Jim, yet I will give you the straight tip that he ain't a boss by no manner of means. He hasn't been on the cross long, and there's lots of men who come into this place who kin give him plenty of points, for he ain't up to all the tricks of the game by a long shot."

"Well, I never worked with McGorgle," the other admitted, with an innocent air, "so of course I don't know much about him. I met him up the river, where we had the same cell, and that is how we come to be pals."

"Yes, I see," the bartender replied, with a patronizing air. "Well, as I said before, I am not saying a word ag'in' him, for Red Jim is a good fellow, and always treated me like a gent, but if I was anxious for to be put onto a good job, McGorgle ain't the man that I should be a-looking for, and you can gamble on that."

"Beggars can't be choosers, you know," the disguised detective replied. "And as Red Jim was the first man I ran across who was in my line I was glad to fasten on to him."

"That was right, and maybe he has got something good in view, but if he don't turn up trumps, you jest tell me, and I think I kin introduce you to some coves who will be able to put you in the way of making a good stake."

The disguised detective thanked the bartender for his friendly offer, and said he would sit down in one of the private rooms to wait for Red Jim's appearance.

Hardly had Joe Phenix got comfortably seated when McGorgle entered.

Red Jim nodded to the bartender, ordered a couple of glasses of beer and joined Joe Phenix in the private apartment.

Then the two sipped the drink, while McGorgle explained to the detective all that had occurred.

The two sat with the door open, for Joe Phenix advised against its being closed.

"If we are careful to speak in a low tone, no one will be able to overhear us," the detective remarked. "And if we close the door remark will be at once excited, and just at present it is our game not to attract any attention."

Red Jim replied that he appreciated the force of this reasoning, and agreed that the detective's counsel was wise.

The face of Joe Phenix was calm and impassive as he listened to the recital of the other; he

spoke not until the story was ended, and then he said, in his quiet way:

"This is a great piece of luck, for this is the very mansion in which I desired to introduce you."

"The thought came to me as soon as the details of the scheme were revealed," Red Jim remarked. "But I, like you, thought that it was a great bit of luck, and I was hardly willing to believe that it could be so."

"It is correct, and, thanks to the fortunate chance, we will secure so great an advantage that there is hardly a doubt we will succeed in trapping our men."

"I will apply for the position, then?"

"By all means, and as the arrangements are made you will be certain to secure the situation," the detective replied.

"Really, when I come to think this matter over I am unable to remember a case where things were in better trim," Joe Phenix continued. "You will be in the house, and the conspirators, thinking that you are one of their men, will allow you to understand some of their plans, for it will not be possible for them to go on with the work and keep you in ignorance."

"That is so."

"You will go ahead, you know, just the same as though you were really devoted to their service."

"Yes, I understand."

"And we must arrange a plan by means of which you can communicate with me, so I can know every move as soon as possible after it is made."

It was not a difficult matter for a man of Joe Phenix's experience to arrange this, and after the scheme was fully explained the two departed, separating on the street after leaving the saloon.

The detective was much pleased with the prospect.

"Smart as the fellows think they are, it is big money that I catch them," he declared.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DISCONTENTED MAN.

JOE PHENIX proceeded toward Broadway feeling extremely well-satisfied with the progress which he had made.

"There is an old saying that it is better to be born lucky than rich," he remarked. "And I certainly believe that the saying applies as well to me as to any other man in the world."

"This meeting with Red Jim was a rare piece of good fortune and, thanks to the lucky chance, I shall undoubtedly succeed in securing an advantage which I had no hope of gaining."

"Three good agents have I engaged, and if I can get three more anywhere near as good I shall consider that I am extremely fortunate."

"And now the question arises where shall I look for agent number four?"

The detective meditated for a few minutes upon this point.

"The chance of accident has placed two in my way—two that I had no idea of getting. The actress I had in my mind; still, luck favored me by bringing me in contact with her for I might not have been able to find out where she lived, and, most certainly, if I had not happened to meet her, and she had gone to the opium joint, as she intended, the chances are great that I would not have been able to have secured her services."

"Fortune has stood my friend so well thus far in the game that it will not be wise for me to expect I will be equally favored in the future, therefore, I must depend upon my own wits."

"Let me see! where will I find agent number four?"

And as he put the question there came to his mind the remembrance of a retired detective, a man who had done excellent work in his day, but for the past fifteen years had been on the shelf.

He was one of the first men with whom Joe Phenix had worked, and the detective on his last meeting with the veteran had asked him in a joking way if he didn't want a chance to show the new generation of detectives how games could be worked, and the old-timer had replied that he wouldn't mind doing a little business in the detective line.

"He has been on the retired list so long that it is not probable that these men who are trying to bleed the millionaire will know anything about him, and therefore if I can persuade him to take a hand in the game he, undoubtedly, will be able to be of great assistance," the man-hunter soliloquized.

"Let me see: if I remember rightly he lives at Fort Lee, and he said that if I ever came out there to see him, any of the tradesmen could direct me to his house."

"Now, as I believe in taking time by the forelock, and haven't anything in particular to attend to at present, I will take a trip up to Fort Lee and see if I can't make some arrangement with the veteran."

The detective was a man who believed in letting the deed follow close upon the thought, and so he set out immediately for the home of the retired thief-taker.

Fort Lee is a small village on the west bank of the Hudson River a few miles above the metropolis, and chiefly noted as being an excursion point—a breathing spot—for the denizens of Manhattan Island.

There is a line of small boats which ply between the city and the village, and Joe Phenix took passage on one of them, but as he had to wait some time for a boat, it was dark before he reached his destination.

He was destined to be unsuccessful in his quest, for when he inquired concerning the veteran, he was told that the ex-detective had gone to England on a visit to his relatives, and was not expected to return for three months.

"I have only had my labor for my pains," the man-hunter remarked, as he returned to the dock.

But this was not the only disappointment which awaited him.

An accident had happened to the machinery of the boat, and she had been drawn off.

There was a boatman on hand, though, who offered to row the detective across to the New York side of the river, where he would be able to take a car for down-town.

So Joe Phenix crossed with the boatman, and upon getting upon the east bank, found that he would have to wait about half an hour for a car.

By this time the moon was up, and the detective, in order to pass the minutes away, walked out on a pier which jutted into the river.

There was a pile of bricks on the end of the dock, and some loose lumber.

Joe Phenix sat down on a stick of timber, and fell to meditating.

He had not been thus occupied over five minutes when he was roused from his abstraction by the sound of footsteps.

A man was advancing toward the end of the pier.

He came straight out to the end, and placing one foot upon the stringpiece, halted and looked down upon the restless surface of the moving tide.

Joe Phenix, sitting partially behind the pile of bricks, had a good view of the stranger when he halted, and yet he occupied such a position that the stranger did not see him as he passed the brick-pile.

The new-comer was a nicely-dressed young fellow of twenty-five, or thereabouts, with a well-knit, muscular figure and a strongly-marked face.

He was what nine persons out of ten would call an extremely ugly man, yet he had good eyes, and an expert judge of human nature would have said that though his countenance was not handsome, yet it had an honest look, which many a good-looking man might be proud to wear.

The bright, full moon, flooding the earth with its silver rays, rendered all objects almost as visible as though the noonday sun was shining, and so Joe Phenix was able to discover that though the young man was apparently nicely dressed, yet his dark business suit was worn almost threadbare, and his face had a gaunt and pinched expression, as though he had not had enough to eat.

A few moments the stranger gazed upon the dark waters, Joe Phenix watching him with interest, for there was something about the man which appealed powerfully to his feelings, and then he spoke.

"The story of the waters of Lethe is a fable, so this wise age declares, and men laugh at the idea that by a draught of the sparkling fluid forgetfulness could be obtained," the stranger exclaimed.

"And yet here are the waters of forgetfulness, flowing right beneath my feet; one single plunge—a few convulsive gasps, and all the toils and tribulations of this weary life will be forgotten."

"Why should I hesitate to make the leap? What tie is there to bind me to life? Not a single one! I am but one of the vast number of men who people this mighty city, and when I am gone no one will miss me. A single atom has dropped out of the great whole, and so insignificant a one that its absence will never be noticed."

"No, there is no earthly reason why I should not make a hole in the water, and thus learn the dark secret of eternity."

By this time Joe Phenix had arrived at the opinion that it was his cue to speak.

"Don't you think that it is rather impolite to venture into a world to which you have not been invited?" the detective asked in his dry way.

The stranger gave a sudden start, being taken completely by surprise, and then faced around and confronted Joe Phenix.

"I was not aware that I was not alone!" he exclaimed in a tone which showed he was annoyed by the interruption.

"I understand that, of course, but this is a public place, you know, and it is not strange when a man utters his thoughts aloud that his words should be overheard."

"It is none of my business—I understand that, perfectly well," the detective continued. "But it is my opinion that when anybody sees a fellow mortal about to commit a rash and foolish act

it is the duty of that party to remonstrate by words, if not by act."

"Pardon me if I say to you that it is my opinion that you are not in a position to decide whether the course I am about to pursue is wise or not," the stranger remarked, speaking politely, yet with an intonation which showed he did not relish the interference.

"My dear sir, you must allow me to say that in my judgment it is almost impossible for a human being to be placed in such a situation that a rush, uncalled, into the other world could be justified by the facts in the case," Joe Phenix declared in an argumentative way.

"Ah, I see, you will allow that there can be such a case!" the stranger declared.

"Well, yes, I can imagine that an unfortunate mortal afflicted with some incurable disease, and racked by fearful pains, for which the healing art could prescribe no remedy, might be justified in seeking refuge from the ills of this world by making the fearful leap in the dark which lands the maker of it in the unknown land 'from whose bourne no traveler returns,' but as far as I can judge from your appearance this case does not fit you at all."

"And can a man not be ill in mind as well as in body?" the other exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, but unless a man is insane beyond the hope of recovery the ills of the mind can be cured," the detective replied. "And although I do not profess to be an expert in deciding whether a man be sane or otherwise, yet according to my judgment there isn't anything the matter with you, as far as your wits are concerned," the detective remarked in a very positive way.

"Wise judges are we of each other!" the stranger exclaimed with a harsh laugh. "I see that you hold the opinion, common to the most of mankind, that a mind diseased can be cured as easily as a bodily illness."

"Well, is not that view correct?"

"Indeed it is not, and I can prove it to you by relating my story!" the other exclaimed.

"I should really like to hear it, for although you are an entire stranger to me yet I can assure you that I take a deep interest in your case," Joe Phenix remarked.

"I want to show you that I am fully justified in contemplating suicide," the stranger remarked as he took a seat upon the stick of timber by the side of the detective.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRANGE TALE.

"I AM an Englishman by birth and my name is Clement Mairstone," the stranger began. "I am the child of chance, having been abandoned when an infant, and picked up by the police in the streets of London."

"I was placed in a foundling hospital and in due time transferred to a foundling school, where I grew up strong and healthy, and as I was a bright and intelligent boy, although as ugly as sin, I was a favorite with the masters and so my early path in life was a comparatively smooth one."

"When I was about thirteen I attracted the attention of the doctor who was accustomed to visit the school."

"He was an extremely ugly man, an old bachelor full of odd and whimsical ways, and he said he was going to do something for me because I was the only human being whom he had ever seen that he believed to be uglier than himself."

"Well, that was rather a left-handed compliment," the detective observed.

"I have no doubt that it was the truth for I was hideously ugly as a boy, uglier than I now am as a man, so you can judge what a perfect fright I must have been."

"I have seen a good many worse-looking men than you are," Joe Phenix remarked.

"That may be possible, but it does not make me any the less hideous," the other rejoined.

"Beauty is only skin deep, you know; handsome is as handsome does!"

"Well, as far as that goes I don't think I am much behind my fellow mortals, for I have always tried to do as nearly right as I could since I have had a will of my own," the young man declared.

"But to return to my tale. The old doctor, despite his odd ways, proved to be a kind master to me, and when I grew old enough he allowed me to study medicine as I had a taste for it."

"He aided me both with money and counsel and in my twenty-first year I graduated and was turned out upon the world licensed to kill or cure."

"The week after I received my diploma my protector was stricken with apoplexy and died almost immediately."

"That was an extremely unfortunate thing for you, I should judge," Joe Phenix remarked.

"It was, indeed. My benefactor was a man of wealth, and being a crusty old bachelor, who had quarreled with all his relations, I had reason to expect that I would come in for a good share of his property; in fact, he had as good as told me so a dozen times. But he had no idea that

his thread of life would be so suddenly cut in twain, for he was only a little over fifty years of age, and confidently expected to enjoy twenty or thirty years more of life."

"This is an uncertain world," Joe Phenix exclaimed. "And it is not given to man to tell how long his tenure of life will last."

"Yes, and it is a well-known fact that doctors are never as successful when they attempt to attend to their own ailments as when they prescribe for strangers."

"That is on a par with the old adage that the lawyer who conducts his own case has a fool for a client," the detective observed.

"Yes, it is the same idea. As my benefactor had no apprehension that he would be taken away so soon, he was not at all prepared for the coming of the destroyer, so his house was not in order. He had not even taken the trouble to draw out a will, so the relatives with whom he had quarreled and fought all his life, came in for his property."

"That was unfortunate for you."

"It certainly was, for although I had been a prudent, saving fellow all my life, yet my opportunities for earning money had been so few that it had not been possible for me to put by anything to speak of, so when, by the doctor's death, I was suddenly thrown upon my own resources, I foresaw that I was likely to have a hard time."

"I can understand that," the detective remarked. "All the learned professions are overcrowded, even in this country, and I presume that it is much worse in England."

"That is true; a young doctor without friends or influence to aid him, to succeed in building up a good practice in an old, overcrowded country like England must work something approaching a miracle."

"I knew the task was an almost hopeless one, and as a party of my friends were going to come to America, with a view to bettering their condition, I determined to come with them, but the main reason which led me to abandon the land of my birth was because I had been idiot enough to fall in love with the pretty sister of one of my associates."

"Love is the mainspring which moves the majority of men and women."

"The brother of my love was a wheelwright, a good workman, but not a man of any education, neither could the girl boast of much, but she was intelligent, anxious to learn, and as I employed my spare time in teaching her she soon got so that a stranger would never suspect that she did not even know how to read until she was nearly twenty years old."

"We were engaged to be married, and it was understood between us that just as soon as I established a practice sufficiently large to warrant my taking upon myself the responsibilities of married life the union would take place."

"The brother and sister went to housekeeping and I boarded with them."

"It was hard work for an utter stranger like myself to get a start, but fortune seemed to smile upon me and slowly my practice increased."

"At the end of the first year I had got on so well that it seemed probable that before six months more had passed I would be in a position to wed the girl of my heart, but I believe I was born under an unlucky star for just at this time—just as I saw clear water ahead—my sweetheart's brother fell into evil ways, neglected his work, took to drinking, and all the support of the house came upon my shoulders."

"Under the circumstances this certainly was a most unfortunate thing," the detective observed.

"The brother was a good-hearted fellow, one of the kind of men who are nobody's enemy but their own. I remonstrated, but no amount of talk would turn him from the evil associates who were leading him to ruin."

"I struggled manfully under the burden, but it was too heavy for me; I could not gain enough to support the three of us and was compelled to draw upon my savings."

"Then in an evil hour my sweetheart proposed to go out to work so as to lessen the strain upon me."

"I consented, unwillingly enough, for I had an apprehension that trouble would come of it, although I could not give any reason for the feeling."

"My fears were soon realized. The owner of the shop to which the girl went took a fancy to the blooming English lass, and she, dazzled by the idea of marrying a man of wealth, coolly threw me overboard, and in just one month from the day in which she entered the shop married the proprietor."

"Well, that certainly was quick work!" Joe Phenix declared.

"I strove to bear my disappointment like a man, but it took the heart out of me; I was really careless whether I lived or died."

"The man my sweetheart married was a middle-aged German, a gross, fat fellow, who was even more ugly and repulsive than myself, so the girl could not plead in extenuation of her broken faith that she had fallen in love with the man. The actual truth was that she had married the fellow because he was wealthy—and

really sold herself for money just as much as though she had been put up at auction and knocked down to the highest bidder."

"Yes, there is altogether too much of that sort of thing going on, but, as a rule, the woman who sells herself for money lives to bitterly regret the transaction," Joe Phenix remarked.

"It was so in this case. About a month after the marriage I met the girl. Her brother was dying and I sent a message that if she wanted to see him before he sunk into the grave she must lose no time in coming. But she delayed and her brother was dead when she came. The life of dissipation which he had led killed just as surely as though he had fallen by the hand of a foe."

"The girl's marriage had been a sudden and secret one; the first intimation that either her brother or myself had of it was a note containing a ten-dollar bill, sent by a messenger boy. In this note she announced that she had wedded her employer, and said that every week she would send ten dollars to her brother, but that any effort on his part to obtain an interview with her would result in the immediate stoppage of the allowance."

"She wished to avoid a scene, I presume," the detective remarked. "She was afraid that she would be reproached for her action."

"Yes, I suppose so. The brother accepted the conditions gladly enough. He had arrived at stage when all he cared for was money to enable him to keep well soaked in liquor from morning until night, and as the worse the liquor the cheaper it was, he bought the vile stuff which is sold in this country so commonly, although it is little better than rank poison."

"And so undermined his constitution, I presume."

"Yes, and after the end came I had an interview with the woman, whom I loved better than I did my own life."

"When she encountered me, and was told that she had come too late, she did not give way to grief, and it was evident the news was not unexpected. In fact, she said as much, and then when I, unable to resist the impulse to ask her to explain her conduct, uttered a few words of reproach, she replied in a dogged, defiant way that she had contemplated the step for years, only the man with wealth had not come along, admitted that she liked me far better than she did the man whom she had wedded, declared that not for the sake of any human being would she undergo the pangs of poverty when she could acquire the luxury that plenty of money can give, even though she was compelled to sacrifice herself to attain her object."

"A woman without a heart," the detective observed.

"I saw that I had made a terrible mistake when I gave to this woman all the love which I had so freely lavished upon her, but, strange as it may appear to you, even when I discovered how unworthy she was of the love of any honest man, it did not cure the passion which burnt in my breast."

"That is human nature, and the ancient poet describes it when he declared that the moon often shines brighter on a puddle than on the ocean, so humans often lavish the richest treasure of their love on an unworthy object."

"The interview was a brief one and the woman, who had taken from me by her action all the hope of my life, departed."

"But there is justice in this world, although man often loudly cries out that there is not," the young doctor declared in an impressive way.

"Three months after the marriage of this false-hearted girl to the German, his wife and three children arrived from the old country, where he had deserted them years ago."

"Chance had brought to the forsaken wife the knowledge that her husband was in New York, and had prospered, so she crossed the ocean, to hunt him down."

"There was a terrible time, of course, the German wife took possession of the house where my false one was reigning as mistress."

"The merchant, knowing that he was guilty, sought refuge in flight, and escaped to parts unknown."

"The first wife who had undoubted legal proof that she was the lawful spouse of the German had no more mercy upon her than she had upon me and put her out into the street, and you can judge how strong my love was for that woman when I tell you that even then, if I had known the truth, which I did not until it was too late, I would have gladly taken her to my heart again!"

"Your love indeed was great!"

"The shame of the disclosure, as well as the fact that she was thus rudely thrust back to a life of poverty, preyed so upon the unfortunate woman that she sought forgetfulness and rest beneath the waters of the river, and the first intelligence I had of the sad affair was when I read in the newspaper of her body being recovered from the dark waters."

"Is it any wonder then that I am not anxious to live?" the young man exclaimed in a mild way.

"Why should I not seek the waters of oblivion, just as that unfortunate woman did? Why should I live?"

CHAPTER XIX.
ANOTHER AGENT.

"My dear fellow, according to your story the woman committed a crime, but that is no reason why you should make an idiot of yourself, and any man who rushes out of the world when he is able to stay in it certainly shows that he has lost the use of his wits," the detective remarked in his calm, judicial way.

"I hold that we were put in this world for a certain purpose," Joe Phenix continued. "We have nothing to say about our coming into existence—are not consulted in regard to the matter at all, and our departure is regulated in the same way, therefore, I consider that it is extremely presumptuous on the part of any human to attempt to interfere in the matter and most certainly if there is any punishment in the other world—and few are disposed to doubt it—then the rash mortal who is not content to wait for the decrees of fate will be apt to suffer."

The young man pondered over the matter for a few moments before he replied, and then he shook his head doubtfully and said:

"While I must admit that there is a great deal of truth in what you say, yet I am not satisfied but that in a case like my own a man is not justified in deciding for himself whether he had better stay in the world or go out of it."

"Now, as I have explained to you, I am so utterly miserable that life has no charms for me, and not only that, but I am in such a state it is almost impossible for me to get enough to live on. My practice is all gone, for mentally during the last month or two I have not been fit to attend to my patients, so I have at last reached the stage when starvation stares me in the face, and at such a point I think it better for a man to seek an easy, almost painless death beneath the waters of the river than to slowly perish by the pangs of hunger."

"Ah, yes, but you are begging the question!" Joe Phenix exclaimed. "There is no reason why you should die of starvation. This world owes us all a living and we can get it if we make the proper effort, but if we do not try we ought to suffer. As well might a man complain that he could not get enough to eat because when he sits at a well-furnished table he is too lazy to put the food in his mouth."

"There is work for everybody in this world, although sometimes the man and the toil are so widely separated that it is hard work for the first to find the second, but there is too much money and too much charity for any one to die of hunger in any civilized land."

"Yes, I believe you are right," the young man replied, in a thoughtful way. "But to a man like myself the idea of subsisting upon charity is extremely repugnant."

"Oh, I can understand that. I should feel the same way myself, but it is really a false pride, when you come to look at the matter in the proper light," the detective argued. "There are very few people in this life who are not compelled to put themselves under obligations to some one at some time, and a man should look at the matter in this way: A. obliges me now; it is possible that I never will be able to return the favor as far as A. is concerned, but I can square the account by obliging B., who needs assistance."

"Yes, that is true; but I never thought of looking at the matter in that way; there is no doubt though that we are greatly dependent upon each other, we poor humans, and I believe you are right when you say that it is a false pride which prevents a man from asking and obtaining assistance when he needs aid."

"Most certainly it is, and it is a pity that the sentiment is so common. We are placed in this world to help one another, and the far-reaching declaration that all mankind are brothers is strictly true, and a great deal of misery might be averted if everybody would act on the idea."

"And now here is another point in your case which I have not touched upon, but which deserves consideration," the detective remarked.

"Your soul is possessed with sorrow because a woman has proved faithless. You seek in death forgetfulness. You honestly believe, no doubt, that this fickle-minded fair one is the only woman in the world for whom you will ever care; of course, I presume you are aware that thousands of men have thought in just that way, and then in a few months, or years, as the case may be, found another woman in whose arms they completely forgot all about the loss of the first charmer."

"Yes, I know that; and I suppose I am somewhat egotistical in believing that my sorrow is so great that I will never get over it, and that it will be impossible to find consolation in the love of any other woman," the young man observed, slowly.

"Undoubtedly!" Joe Phenix exclaimed. "Time is the great healer, and the sorrow which in the beginning seems to be so heavy that it will not be possible for us to bear it, soon grows lighter and lighter as it recedes down the aisle of time, and after the lapse of years, when we look back we wonder that the calamity seemed so great to us."

"You are right!" the young man exclaimed,

his manner now more cheerful than it had been at any time during the conversation. "Time does indeed heal our griefs, and I suppose, though the future now looks black, indeed, that if I face my misfortune like a man, it will not be long before I will learn to forget the gloomy past."

"Yes, particularly if you employ your mind actively in some vocation. The man who is full of business has no time to waste in idle grief," the detective declared.

"The best illustration that I have ever met with on this subject was in a German story that I once read," Joe Phenix added.

"The hero of the tale was a wealthy man, who was suddenly deprived of a dearly beloved wife. His sorrow was so great that his doctor feared for his life, and in order to rouse the man from the despair into which he had fallen, the physician advised a visit to a celebrated watering-place, thinking a change of air would be a benefit. The afflicted man consented to go, for he was in such a state of mind that he was willing to agree to almost anything."

"He started, and when he arrived at the depot the hackman took advantage of his abstraction to overcharge him, but by this time he had begun to rouse up a little and he remonstrated with the man upon the imposition. The driver retorted angrily and the discussion was a warm one."

"Then, after he got in the trail he discovered that he had lost his ticket, and this incident brought on a row with the railroad men; this episode was no sooner over than he had trouble with some of the passengers who objected because he lighted his pipe to enjoy a quiet smoke, thinking it would calm his nerves, so by the time he arrived at his journey's end he was most thoroughly waked up, and had come to the conclusion that life still had some charms, although he had suffered a sore affliction."

"The story is a good one, and there is no doubt that there is much truth in it," the young man remarked. "I suppose that if I could enter upon some pursuit which would actively employ my mind so I would not brood upon the trouble which has overtaken me I would in time learn to forget it."

"That is my opinion," Joe Phenix observed. "And, luckily, I am in a position to offer you employment which will be certain to occupy your mind so that you will not have much time to reflect upon the sorrows of the past."

The face of the young doctor lighted up as he listened to the words of the man-hunter.

"Upon my word! you put new life in me!" he exclaimed. "You are right! existence still has some charms, and I assure you I will do my best to deserve any confidence that you may see fit to repose in me."

"Well, I think I am a pretty good judge of human nature, and I came to the conclusion early in our conversation that you were a man who could be trusted."

"It is not seemly for a man to sing his own praises," the other remarked. "But I will be egotistical enough to declare that I do not think you will ever have cause to regret placing confidence in me."

The business in which I wish to employ you is a particular and difficult one and the man who engages in it must be able to use both his eyes and his ears to the best advantage."

"I think I can do that," the young doctor observed. "No one ever accused me of being either blind or deaf."

"You will be able to guess the nature of the business when I state that I am a detective."

"Ah, yes," and the young man surveyed the other with eyes full of curiosity. "I am not at all astonished by the announcement for I made up my mind some time ago that you were no common man."

"I am not now in the public service, although I used to be," the detective explained. "I am carrying on business in a private way and am at present engaged on a very particular case," and then without mentioning any names Joe Phenix related the particulars of the arrangement he had made with the millionaire.

The young man listened with the utmost attention and when the recital was ended he nodded his head in approval and said:

"The scheme is an excellent one in my opinion, and there is little doubt, it seems to me, that you will succeed in trapping your birds."

"The chances are good, I think," Joe Phenix remarked. "Now, if you care to go into the affair I can introduce you into this house in the guise of a medical specialist. The gentleman is rich enough to afford such a luxury and as his health is not good, no suspicion will be excited."

The young doctor declared that he would only be too glad to engage in the enterprise and the pair soon came to an agreement.

Another secret agent was thus secured.

CHAPTER XX.
THE LAST OF THE SIX.

JOE PHENIX felt in a very contented state of mind as the iron horse bore him rapidly toward the city.

"I only lack a couple more agents," he mused. "And there is not much doubt but what I will

be able to pick them up in a day or two. So far I have been singularly fortunate in securing good people, and if the last two are up to the mark of the first four I think I will have cause to be proud of my assistants."

An hour later the detective, his disguise removed, started out for a walk, and as he came out of his house a lad ran up to him crying out the evening newspapers.

He was a typical New York boy, about fifteen years old, but being undersized, with a sharp face, did not appear to be more than twelve.

The gamin was no stranger to Joe Phenix, for he had been a messenger boy, and had often served the detective.

"Hello, Petey, what are you doing up here in the newspaper line?" Joe Phenix asked.

"How do you do, Mister Phenix?" responded the lad, ducking his head politely. "Kinder astonished you to see me on this lay, hey?"

"Yes; this is rather out of your line, isn't it?"

"Well, sir, it is the only line that I have got now. I ain't with the messenger company any more."

"How is that?"

"Got the grand bounce," the boy replied, with a melancholy shake of the head.

"That is very bad indeed, and I am sorry to hear it."

"You see, sir, I ran up ag'in' an awful run of bad luck," the lad observed, with the air of a philosopher. "And it wasn't through no fault of mine that I got the sack, either. I will tell you all about it."

"I shall be glad to hear your story," the detective observed, kindly. "You always seemed to be a bright, capable boy, and I am sorry to hear that you have been unfortunate."

"It was in this way, sir. I answered a call to a broker's office, and he sent me with a parcel to give to a lady up-town—she was one of them actresses at the Paragon Theater. The parcel was a small one, and the man told me to be careful and not lose it, for it was a valuable one, but you know that is the kind of steer that they always give a fellow, so I didn't pay much attention to it."

"I was told to take the L Road, and as it was late in the afternoon there was a crush and in getting on the train three fellers pretty near squeezed the life out of me, so I jest up and told 'em what I thought of 'em, and we had it pretty hot until we got to the next station when they got off saying that they wasn't going to take no back talk from any dirty-faced district messenger boy."

"The passengers kinder snickered at the idee that I should drive three sich duffers from the car, and I tell you, Mister Phenix I felt awful big until I happened to put my hand in my pocket and found that my parcel was gone."

"The men worked the 'hold up' act on you, as the rascals call it," the detective observed. "Two of them crowded against you while the third picked your pocket."

"Yes, and they worked the trick to the queen's taste!" the boy declared. "For the fellow that took the parcel slit my pocket open with a knife so that it must have tumbled right out into his hand."

"Yes, that is an old trick, but these men must have known that you were carrying a valuable parcel or else they never would have troubled you."

"Yes, I s'pose so; I went right back to the office and made my report, then the broker was sent for, and an awful row he kicked up, not that he cared, he said, for the jewelry that was in the parcel, but there were some letters, and he was afraid that the men who had got them would try to make him pay big money, and, would you believe it, Mister Phenix, he declared that it was his opinion I was in with the thieves, and as he was a big man down-town, the boss in order to make himself solid fired me!"

"That was harsh treatment certainly."

"And it ain't no easy matter, you know, for a boy to get a situation when he ain't able to show a recommendation from his last place."

"Very true; but how are you situated? Have you any folks in the city?"

"Yes, sir, I've got a mother and two sisters. Mother is too old to work now, and she isn't able to do much. My sisters are both younger than I am, and one of 'em isn't strong, so she can't work more than half the time, and I tell you, Mister Phenix, it is mighty hard scratching sometimes for us to get along, so when I lost my place I pitched right in to sell newspapers, and even if I don't make more than forty or fifty cents a day it ain't to be sneezed at!"

"Decidedly not!" the detective remarked.

While the boy had been telling his story an idea had occurred to him.

Would not this lad make a good secret agent? He was keen-witted, and unusually sharp, and it must be a smart rascal indeed who would suspect that a lad of his years could be a police spy.

The only doubt there was about the matter was in regard to whether the lad could be depended upon or not, but from what the detective had seen of the boy he thought the chances were good he could be trusted.

It would be an easy matter to introduce the lad into the office, and the more the detective reflected upon the scheme the better he liked it.

So he suggested the idea to Petey Gallagher, as the boy was named, and the youth jumped at the chance.

"Oh, I kin do it right up to the handle, Mister Phenix, if you will only give me a chance!" he declared. "Don't you be afeard that I will let anybody ketch onto the trick, for I am altogether too fly for that."

The detective replied that he was willing to give him a trial, much to the delight of the lad, and then Joe Phenix took the boy's address and told him to expect a letter in a day or two.

The boy departed in a most gleeful mood, while the detective continued on his course to Broadway.

"Only one more agent to secure," the man-hunter mused. "And then the band will be completed—the Silent Six, to give the organization a melo dramatic title."

"New York is a big city, and, like a magnet, attracts all sorts of people, particularly those of a roving disposition—people who would be valuable to me in a case of this kind."

"I suppose I may look upon myself as being exceedingly lucky in getting five agents so quickly, and I am expecting too much in calculating upon closing up the ranks to-night; still, as I seem to be playing in great good luck, as a gambler would remark, I think there is a chance of my securing the sixth agent before I sleep this night."

"Let me see! I have four in the house and one in the office. The house is well covered, and if I can get another in the office it will do."

By this time Joe Phenix had reached Broadway, and as he turned into the main thoroughfare of the great city he came face to face with a handsome girl of twenty or thereabouts.

She was tall, very lady-like, and dressed with extreme neatness.

An exclamation of joyful surprise escaped from her lips as she beheld the detective.

"Oh, Mr. Phenix, I am so glad to have met you!" the young lady exclaimed.

The detective took the hand which the girl extended with such frankness, but he had to tax his recollection to recall who she was.

The lady saw that he was puzzled and came to his assistance.

"I suppose that it is extremely foolish in me to cry out in this way, and expect you to remember me just because I remember you!" she exclaimed. "I did not take into consideration the fact that you have not seen me for seven or eight years, and the lapse of time has changed me from a bread-and-butter school-girl into a young lady, while you have not altered in the least."

"But I remember you now, although you have changed so materially that at first I did not recognize you," Joe Phenix replied.

"You are Margaret Irving."

"The same!" the girl responded, and then the two shook hands again.

The girl was the daughter of Detective Irving who met his death while attempting to hunt down the mysterious villain who was thrilling the great metropolis to its very center by his mysterious murders as related in the story entitled the Bat of the Battery.

"I am very glad indeed to meet you, and where have you been all these years?" Joe Phenix asked.

"I have been living in my father's native place, Concord, New Hampshire," the girl responded. "After his untimely death, which so abruptly broke up our home, mother returned to Concord and there we remained. Mother's folks were farmers and well-to-do, and we were very comfortable, but about a year ago, after a long illness, mother died, and when I was left all alone in the world I made up my mind to strike out for myself, so I learned stenography and typewriting, and here I am in New York, eager for a chance to show New Yorkers what a smart girl I am."

An idea came suddenly to the detective as the girl finished her speech.

Was she not the very one he needed to complete the band—the Silent Six?

The daughter of as good a detective as the metropolis had ever known, if any of the man-catching genius of her father had descended to her she would be extremely valuable, and in a big office like the millionaire's it would be easy to make a place for her.

Joe Phenix lost no time in explaining matters to the girl, and he found her not only willing but anxious to undertake the task, and therefore it did not take long for the two to arrive at an understanding.

And so the last one of the band of the Silent Six was secured, and after parting with the girl, Joe Phenix went on his way with a heart full of joyful hopes for the future.

Success seemed to be certain.

CHAPTER XXI.

A NEW MOVE.

AND now a forward leap of a month our story takes, but in that time nothing of interest con-

nected with the characters of our tale has occurred.

The six secret agents of Joe Phenix had entered the service of Abraham Englebert, and this matter had been arranged so skillfully that both the millionaire and the detective felt pretty certain that no one would be likely to suspect there was anything wrong about the matter.

Joe Phenix instructed his agents not to make a report unless there was something important to communicate, and as not a single word had been received from any one of them it was plain that no discoveries had been made.

The millionaire had been warned also to immediately give notice if any more mysterious communications were received, and as he had not notified the detective, Joe Phenix understood that the warnings had ceased.

This circumstance puzzled the man-hunter a little, and he was inclined to regard it as a bad omen, for it suggested to him that the conspirators suspected that extra exertions had been put forth to capture them, and that was why they were keeping quiet.

If this was so—and as far as Joe Phenix could see it was the only solution of the riddle—the existence of his Silent Six was either known, or suspected, by the conspirators, and the detective was much annoyed, for it seemed to imply that the rascals were so sharp-witted that they had been able to detect that spies had been introduced into the house, and yet the secret agents had not been able to get any clew to the conspirators.

"But from the fact that the mysterious warnings had ceased it would appear as if my Silent Six had succeeded in frightening the rascals from their game, so my scheme has been in a slight degree successful, but I am not at all content though, for I had set my heart upon capturing the fellows, but if my spies have frightened them into giving up the game the chances are not brilliant that I will be able to do it," the detective observed, as he mused upon the situation.

Joe Phenix was alone in his office, his assistant being absent.

The postman brought a letter.

It was from Englebert, and the millionaire desired an interview, the same precautions being taken as on the previous occasion.

The detective assumed the same disguise which he had worn before and was picked up by Englebert in a coach on upper Broadway, just as he had been when he first met the millionaire.

Englebert looked troubled, and as soon as the coach was on its way produced a letter, saying:

"I found this epistle in the inner pocket of my coat, among some other letters which were in the pocket this morning. It had evidently been placed there while I slept last night, for I had occasion to look at the letters before I went to bed last night, and I know that it was not there then."

The detective read the letter aloud, and it was particularly brief and to the point, being as follows:

"I have not troubled you with a communication for some time, for I wanted to afford you an ample opportunity to reflect upon the matter, and then I was anxious to see whether the detectives whom you have employed would be able to do anything or not."

"By this time though I have become fully satisfied—as no doubt you are—that the fellows are N. G."

"Now, as the detectives can't help you, don't you think it would be best for you to fork over the fifty thousand dollars, and to save your precious carcass from coming to harm?"

"I shall only give you one more warning and then strike!"

"If you want to come to an arrangement wear a red rose-bud in your button-hole when you go on 'change to-morrow, and then I will advise you how I want the matter arranged."

There wasn't any signature to the letter, and the detective smiled in his dry way as he folded the paper and returned it to the millionaire.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Englebert asked in an anxious way.

"The matter is going on better than I expected," Joe Phenix replied. "I was afraid that the scamps had detected that a band of spies were on their tracks, and, having taken the alarm, had given up the attack, but this letter convinces me that though they suspect the detectives are after them, yet they haven't any idea as to how the trick is being worked."

"Have any of your secret agents discovered aught of importance?"

"No, none of them have seen anything to justify them in making a report, and that proves that the rascals are playing an extremely deep game, but now that they have commenced operations again the chances are that I will be able to catch them."

"I sincerely hope so, for I can tell you, Mr. Phenix, that it is not pleasant for a man to live in constant fear that there is a lurking foe in the dark ready to strike at his life."

"Oh, yes, I can understand that readily enough," Joe Phenix replied. "But at present there is very little cause for you to feel uneasy about the matter. You are the goose whom

they expect to lay golden eggs, and you can rest assured that they will not attempt to harm you until they become satisfied that you are not going to comply with their demands."

"Yes, I presume that is the truth," the millionaire remarked, thoughtfully. "But for all that I must say that the affair makes me very uneasy all the same."

"I think that it is about time that I took an active part in this matter," the detective observed. "Although none of my Silent Six have succeeded in hitting upon a clew, possibly I may be more fortunate."

"I think that idea is a very good one!" the millionaire exclaimed, eagerly. He had a high opinion of Joe Phenix's abilities, and was anxious to get him to take an active hand in the game.

"I will have to take up my quarters in your house for a while, and I must assume such a character that if there are any rascals in your mansion they will be apt to think I would prove to be a first-class victim."

"Ah, yes, I see!" and Englebert rubbed his hands gleefully together, well pleased at the idea.

"I must present the appearance of a man rolling in wealth—a foreigner, not well acquainted with the country, and who would be apt to prove an easy prey."

"Yes, yes, the scheme is a capital one!"

"I think a Cuban would be about the thing; one who comes with letters of introduction to you, and who wants your advice about how he shall invest some very large sums of money in this country."

"Yes, the idea is not at all improbable," the millionaire observed. "Hardly a week passes that my advice is not solicited in regard to some such matter. As I have been so successful in the art of money-making a great many people get the idea that I can tell them how to take a few thousand dollars and make millions out of them."

"The game I propose to play is an extremely old one, but, as a rule, it works successfully, and that is because it appeals to the strongest passion of the average man who becomes a rascal of the type of these who are trying to operate on you."

"Such men leave the path of honesty to tread the devious winding ways of crime because they cannot make money enough in an honest way to satisfy them, and long experience has convinced me that the surest way to trap such fellows is by appealing to their cupidity."

"It certainly seems to be reasonable."

"As I said, the idea is an old one, as old as the hills, but as it is founded on a principle which never changes, it usually works to perfection," the detective remarked.

"Yes, it is an ancient saying that many a man in reaching after a shadow loses the substance," Englebert observed. "And it is very true too. Few men are there who are not anxious to get something for nothing."

"True, and on that idea rascals always work, and if it was not for the fact that mankind is so gullible as to believe that somebody is unwise enough to give a dollar for a cent, the sharpers would have to give up their rascality and find some honest way of making a living."

"That is correct, but as man has always been seeking a short cut to riches ever since the world began, it is not likely that rascals will ever have to abandon their trade for want of dupes."

"Not much doubt about that," the detective assented.

"Now, my game will be to pose as a wealthy Cuban, a man who is so rich that he is careless in regard to his money, and commonly carries a thousand dollars or so around in his pockets. I assume that all is fish that comes to the net of these rascals, who have marked you for a victim, and when they make the discovery that I have plenty of money, it will be the most natural thing in the world for them to attempt to get some of it."

"Yes, yes; and then you will be able to get a chance at them!"

"That is the idea. The wealthy Cuban is a bait to lead them into a trap."

"It appears to me there is a good chance that you will be successful in this undertaking," the millionaire observed, in a thoughtful way.

"Well, in my experience it is a game that has worked successfully more times than any other—that is known to me," Joe Phenix declared.

"The only danger is that the rascals may be smart enough to suspect that I am not what I represent myself to be, and if that should happen the scheme would not work, of course."

"Ah, yes, but they would have to be extra sharp to make that discovery," the millionaire remarked.

"Yes, I flatter myself that that is a fact. But now to return to the letter. You must lead the fellows on and get them to develop their game as much as possible. Wear the rosebud and lead them to believe that you are inclined to come to terms, and be careful not to talk with any detectives, so that if a watch is kept upon you the suspicion will not arise that you are trying to lead the rascals into a trap."

The millionaire promised to be careful, and this brought the interview to an end.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CUBAN.

THE hands of the clocks pointed to the hour of three; the closing minutes of the business day had come to bustling Wall street.

Englebert sat in his private office, enjoying a prime cigar and conversing with his son, Maurice, a slender, effeminate-looking young man of twenty-three, who bore but little resemblance to his stern, resolute-appearing sire, and his private secretary, who answered to the name of Lysander Somerdyke, a man of thirty or thereabouts, dark-faced, and gentlemanly-looking; his high broad forehead betokened a plentiful supply of intellect, while the firm, square jaw and prominent nose seemed to imply that courage and resolution were not wanting in the man's make-up.

He had been in the millionaire's employ for about six months and had obtained his situation in an extremely peculiar way.

During one of the panics to which the money market is subjected, more or less regularly, public opinion ran high against Old Abe.

He was accused of having been instrumental in bringing about the disaster which had brought ruin to some of the oldest houses in the street, and an excited mob of brokers gathered around Englebert's office and talked wildly and loudly of holding him responsible for the trouble.

Old Abe happened to come along just at that moment and violent hands were laid upon him; despite his protests that he really had nothing to do with causing the trouble, and it is probable he would have been seriously injured, perhaps killed, if Somerdyke, who chanced to be passing at that precise moment, had not come to his assistance.

The young man showed fight and succeeded in holding the violent ones of the crowd at bay, until policemen, attracted by the tumult, arrived and rescued the millionaire from his assailants.

This was Somerdyke's introducing to Englebert.

The millionaire was grateful to the man who had risked his person to save him from danger and when he found that he was a stranger in the country seeking employment, having just come from London, and discovered that he had a good business education, possessing some excellent recommendations, he speedily made room for him in his office.

The stranger gave satisfaction, for he worked with an eye single to his employer's interest and soon the millionaire made him his private secretary and gave him quarters in his own house. This move was probably due to the fact that a strong friendship had sprung up between Somerdyke and the millionaire's son, Maurice.

As a rule the young man did not get on well with the clerks in his father's office for he was inclined to be insolent and overbearing and men who amounted to anything would not stand his nonsense, for all who knew anything about the young man understood that he wasn't anything but a mere cipher.

The father was a man of strong personality, while the son was a weak, irresolute fellow, who would assuredly have suffered if he had been obliged to depend upon himself for his daily bread.

Somerdyke was the only man with whom he got along, and his father was glad as he noted the intimacy which existed between the two, for he thought the example of the thoughtful, hard-working young Englishman would be of decided benefit to his son.

The conversation of the three was interrupted by the entrance of the messenger from the outer office who bore a card.

"A gentleman would like to see you, sir, if you can spare the time," the messenger announced. Englebert read the name upon the card aloud.

"Sanchez Alvarado."

And then a line penciled under the name attracted his attention.

"I had the pleasure of meeting you in New Orleans about a year ago."

"Ah, yes, I remember him now!" the millionaire exclaimed. "He is a wealthy Cuban who was in New Orleans, looking after some investments which he had made in the neighborhood of that city—in sugar plantations if I remember rightly."

"Show him in!"

In a few moments the messenger ushered a foreign-looking gentleman into the office, and if the millionaire had not been prepared for the detective's visit he would never have suspected that the individual before him was Joe Phenix, for the change that the great detective had made in his personal appearance was wonderful.

He looked the foreigner to the life!

His face had been stained a dark olive, a wig of black, crispy, curling hair cut off one half of his high forehead, his eyebrows were as black as his hair, and there was a bluish appearance to his upper lip and chin as though he had been in the habit of wearing a mustache and a chin beard.

Then he wore a peculiar kind of a high stand-up collar which made a material difference in the appearance of his neck and chin.

The lion-like throat and massive jaw-bone

were softened so that they did not give the impression of great power, as they were wont to do.

The detective was dressed in a costly dark suit, composed of the finest materials that money could buy.

A diamond ring, worth a couple of thousand dollars of any man's money, sparkled in his silk scarf, and a solitaire diamond ring of even superior value ornamented the little finger of his left hand.

In fact, everything about the man gave the appearance of luxury and wealth.

He bowed with the courtly politeness of one used to the best society as he entered the office, and the millionaire rose to receive him with outstretched hand.

"I have taken the liberty upon you to call," the disguised detective remarked. "And I hope my remembrance has not entirely from your memory faded?"

"Oh, no, I recollect you perfectly!" Englebert responded, as he shook hands warmly with the stranger.

"When I had the pleasure of meeting you in New Orleans you did me the honor to suggest that I should call upon you if I ever came to New York."

"Yes, yes, I remember."

"Well, I am in the city, and I have taken great pleasure in responding to your invitation."

"And I am very glad to see you, I can assure you, Mr. Alvarado!" the millionaire declared. Allow me to introduce my son, Maurice, and my secretary, Mr. Somerdyke."

The gentlemen rose and bowed as they were presented; the Cuban acknowledged the introductions in a careless way, hardly taking the trouble to glance into the faces of the pair, yet bowing with the utmost politeness.

"Pray be seated!" said Englebert.

The Cuban accepted the invitation.

"When did you arrive?" the millionaire asked.

"Only half an hour or so ago. I have come straight from the depot. You see to this great city I am a perfect stranger, and so, as you were kind enough to offer to be my mentor, when I met you in New Orleans, I thought that it would be wise for me to seek your counsel before I selected my quarters."

"Quite right, and I am very much pleased, indeed, that you took me at my word!" Englebert declared. "And I can assure you that I meant all I said. You need not trouble yourself to look for a hotel, for you must make my house your home while you remain in the city."

"Oh, I fear that I would be putting you to too much trouble!" the Cuban exclaimed, with a deprecating bow.

"Not at all, my dear sir!" the millionaire declared. "I should really feel hurt if you did not accept my hospitality."

"Ah, well, if you put it in that way I must accept, of course," the other returned, with another polite bow.

"Yes, consider the matter settled, and anything else that I can do for you, pray command me without hesitation."

"You are so kind!" the Cuban declared, with another one of his courtly bows.

"Oh, I mean what I say, I assure you!"

"I am very glad, indeed, to hear you say so, for it is to ask your advice about certain matters that I have come to New York."

"If you remember, I told you when we met in New Orleans that I was not satisfied with the way that things are going on in Cuba."

"Yes, I recollect."

"Well, affairs on the island are going from bad to worse. The fact is, government affairs there are dreadfully mismanaged. The officials are about all Spaniards from the old country, and the most of them are bent upon filling their own pockets without regard to the welfare of the island."

"Such is usually the case under like circumstances."

"The only salvation for Cuba is annexation to the United States, but Spain will never consent to let go of the 'ever faithful isle' if she can possibly avoid it."

"I presume not."

"Being a Cuban, born and bred, I am at heart a rebel, but as I have never seen a time when the cause of liberty seemed hopeful enough to induce me to declare my true sentiments, I have always kept quiet."

"Under the circumstances you acted wisely!" Englebert declared.

"But as I am not at all satisfied with the way that matters are going on the island I have made up my mind to withdraw all my capital and invest it in this country."

"That is undoubtedly a wise conclusion."

"If you recollect I spoke to you on the subject when I met you in the South."

The millionaire nodded.

"I have made some small investments in that region but there is not the opportunity for the use of a large sum in that quarter," the Cuban observed with the listless air of a spoiled child of fortune.

"Oh, no, New York is the place!" the millionaire declared. "The metropolis is the great

money center of the New World and a man can more easily invest millions here than he can thousands elsewhere."

"I know that you are posted on the subject and that is why I have sought your advice."

"Oh, yes, I can put you into twenty good schemes!" Englebert declared. "But as the business day has ended, suppose we go up-town and enjoy a little recreation?"

The Cuban was agreeable and soon the party were on their way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DEEP GAME.

FOR a week had the disguised detective been a guest at the Englebert mansion, and he had played the part of a wealthy and careless Cuban to the life.

He had flung away his money as recklessly as though he was the proprietor of half-a-dozen gold mines, acting so contrary to the millionaire's custom, who was inclined to be close with his cash, that the servants in the mansion, who had occasion to come in contact with the stranger, were amazed at his liberality, and the general talk in the "servants' hall" was that the stranger must be fairly rolling in riches or else he would not be so free with his money.

And the supposed Cuban was just as popular with the millionaire's family as with the servants, particularly with Englebert's daughter, who was a girl of twenty, intelligent and lady-like, as was only natural considering all the advantages she had had.

Rosalind she was called, a dark-eyed, dark-haired brunette, with but little claims to personal beauty, but she had a good face and possessed a sweet disposition; a will of her own too she possessed, quite a contrast to the irresolute, fickle-minded son, Maurice.

The disguised detective had particularly exerted himself to get on good terms with the son and daughter, and had also done his best, to make a favorable impression upon the secretary, Mr. Somerdyke, taking care however not to overdo the matter—not to appear desirous of making a good impression.

As the reader who has followed the fortunes of Joe Phenix through the various tales of which he has been the hero doubtless understands, the detective was a marvelous actor, and if he had aspired to tread the histrionic boards, certainly would have made a stage "star" of the first magnitude, and in this instance no stage player who has ever won fame and fortune behind the "footlights" could have played the role of a wealthy, careless Cuban, who was so rich that he did not know what to do with his money, any better than the acute detective.

By the way we have neglected to mention that the millionaire's compliance with the request of the unknown correspondent to wear a rosebud in his buttonhole if he was inclined to do business, speedily brought another letter from the mysterious unknown which ran as follows, commencing abruptly, thus:

"Do you really mean business, or are you planning some trap aided by the advice of the detectives, thinking that you will be able to catch me?"

"If this is the case I give you an immediate warning that the scheme will not work."

"Your detectives may be smart but both you and they will find that I am much smarter, and I defy you to catch me, no matter how shrewdly your scheme."

"Now if you are honest in this matter, and have made up your mind to come to terms, put an advertisement in the *Morning Blaster*. Word it in this way: 'I am thinking of coming to terms.' That is all you need to say and then I will write you again."

When the millionaire submitted this letter to the detective, Joe Phenix pondered over the matter for a while before he expressed any opinion, and then he said:

"The man is terribly afraid of being caught in a trap; that is evident, and he does not mean to make any move without careful consideration."

"We have gained a point though, I think. It appears as if the rascals with all their smartness, and in spite of their facilities for gaining information, have not succeeded in discovering the game that we are now playing, for I assume that if they had any suspicion of the truth they would lose no time in letting you know it."

The millionaire agreed with the detective in this assumption.

"I should wait six or seven days before you put in the newspaper notice, just as if you were taking time to deliberate over the matter," the detective advised.

"Our object now is to gain all the time we possibly can, for the more time we can get the better the chance of our getting a clw, which we are liable to stumble upon at any moment."

This was the substance of the conversation between the two and the millionaire obeyed the detective's instructions.

The principal reason why Maurice Englebert had taken such a fancy to the supposed Cuban was because that gentleman played billiards with him and lost money in the most reckless manner.

There was a billiard room in the Englebert

mansion, fitted up in the most sumptuous manner, although the millionaire himself never touched a cue, and neither knew or cared anything about the game, still as it was the fashion to have billiard rooms in millionaires' mansions, Englebert put one in when he fitted up the house, just as he had added a picture gallery, and spent a small fortune in works of art, although he cared nothing at all about such things.

The son though was very fond of billiards, and although he was not a good player, yet he was conceited enough to imagine that he was, and this error cost him dearly, for as he was pig-headed enough to back his opinion with his money, the fast young men at the various clubs, to which the millionaire's son belonged, profited thereby.

Although Joe Phenix played a much better game of billiards than young Englebert, yet it was his policy just now to appear to be an extremely poor player, who believed that he was a good one, and often he had played a few games with Maurice, winning some, apparently more due to luck than to skill in playing, but losing more often, he proposed that the games should be for a small stake, to make it more interesting, announcing too that it was his opinion that he always played a better game when he played for money.

Maurice was nothing loth, for he felt sure he could beat the Cuban, but he was somewhat astonished when he discovered that the guest considered a fifty dollar stake to be an extremely low one.

At the clubs ten dollars a game was the rule, and at this sum it was possible for a man to lose fifty to a hundred dollars in an evening if luck went the wrong way.

The first time that the two played for money Maurice was a hundred dollars ahead when the contest ended, and he secretly rejoiced in the belief that he would be able to make from fifty to a hundred dollars a day out of the Cuban as long as he sojourned in the Englebert mansion.

In the second contest though the young man only succeeded in getting twenty-five dollars ahead, but this result appeared to be because the Cuban made some extremely lucky "scratches."

The disguised detective was after information, but he did not propose to pay too heavily for it, and he managed matters so skillfully that although Maurice seemed to win the majority of the games, yet he could only boast that he was about three hundred dollars ahead after a week's playing.

The young man though did not keep any account of his winnings, and if any one had questioned him in regard to the subject he would have said that he was seven or eight hundred dollars ahead, for as he spent the money as fast as he got it he had no idea how much he had received.

The detective accomplished the object he had in view though.

His purpose was to gain the young man's confidence, and by the time the week was out, young Maurice was of the opinion that the supposed Cuban was about the best friend that he had in the world.

A little incident confirmed the young man in this opinion.

"A rascally tailor," as the young Englebert termed the tradesman, took occasion upon meeting Maurice on the street one day, when the Cuban accompanied him, to dun the young man for a bill of a couple of hundred dollars which had been owed for a year or more.

The man was very polite and respectful, but very urgent too, for he needed the money badly, as he said, otherwise he would never have taken the trouble to dun so good a customer as Mr. Englebert.

The young man proceeded to explain that he happened to be short of money just then, but that next week when he would be in funds—and at this point the Cuban spoke.

"My dear fellow I can let you have a couple of hundred as well as not!" he exclaimed, and he fished a large roll of bills out of his pocket where he carried them in the most careless manner.

Maurice accepted the loan gratefully and so the bill was settled, much to the gratification of the tailor.

This capped the climax and satisfied the young man that the Cuban was indeed a most desirable friend.

Joe Phenix judged that the moment was ripe to secure the confidence of young Englebert, and so that evening he asked Maurice to take him around so that he might behold all the notable sights of New York by gaslight.

The young man was glad of the chance, and about nine o'clock the two set out.

They made the rounds of all the fashionable resorts and about midnight went into one of the popular up-town restaurants for something to eat.

Joe Phenix had kept up the reputation of the Cuban for liberality by spending money like water during the trip.

Wine had been freely ordered and the young man, who was not much given to drinking, had taken far more than his usual allowance, but al-

though his head was weak in some respects it was strong as far as wine was concerned, and all the impression that the sparkling vintage of the grape had produced in him was to make him inclined to talk.

And this was exactly what the disguised detective wanted.

It was not his object to get the young man drunk but to get him to that state when he would feel a desire to be confidential.

The detective ordered a splendid repast, and the choicest wines the establishment boasted to wash it down, and then, when the meal was about ended, and the pair was sipping the strong French coffee, with a wine-glass full of brandy in it, Joe Phenix began operations, thinking that the moment had arrived when the young man could be successfully "pumped."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MAURICE EXPLAINS.

"That was a rather unpleasant episode—that tailor business to-day," the disguised detective remarked.

"Indeed it was!" Maurice Englebert exclaimed, decidedly.

"I must do the man the justice to say that he was very civil, but then it is disagreeable to be dunned, no matter how respectful the creditor may be."

"Oh, yes, there is no mistake about it, that tailor is a nice, agreeable fellow. I have paid him a great deal of money, and he never bothered me before, and I do not doubt that it is just as he said—he is hard pushed and needs the money very badly."

"He talked as though he was speaking the truth."

"And the deuce of the thing is everybody supposes that because I am the son of a millionaire all I have to do is to go to my father and get all the money I want, but that isn't the truth by a long shot!" Maurice declared, with the air of a man who felt that he was grievously wronged.

"Of course it is impossible for a stranger to judge, but your father seems to be quite liberal," the other remarked.

The young man gave utterance to a bitter laugh, and then said:

"Well, I do not doubt that if you were to consult him on the subject he would say that he was very liberal, and I am sure that he is honest about the matter too. He believes that he is liberal, but you must remember that my dad was brought up in a hard school. He hadn't anything when he started, and had to work uncommon hard to get together his first thousand dollars, and his ideas of what a young man ought to have are rather peculiar. Because he was obliged to get along as best he could, he thinks that when he allows me a couple of thousand dollars a year he is providing for me in an extremely liberal manner."

The Cuban shook his head.

"I am no spendthrift, although I mean to live in comfort and do so, yet I get rid of a couple of thousand dollars a month."

"Exactly, and a man like myself, situated as I am, ought to have at the least ten thousand dollars a year!"

"Yes, considering the great wealth of your father, that does not seem to be unreasonable," the disguised detective remarked, in a thoughtful way.

"Not a cent more than I need to maintain my standing among the fellows with whom I associate!" Maurice declared, emphatically.

"But, as I tell you, my dad thinks he is doing the handsome thing by me when he allows two thousand," the young man added. "And there is another point upon which we do not agree, either. My old man thinks I ought to work just as hard as he had to when he was of my age. He doesn't take into consideration the great difference in our positions, you know."

"He had to work because he couldn't help himself, but in my case what is the use of my toiling like a dray-horse when there isn't any need of it?"

"Yes, that is true," the Cuban assented. It was the policy of the disguised detective to lead the other on by agreeing with him.

"Ever since I was old enough to understand the thing, the idea has been hammered into me that I must become a first-class business man, so as to be in readiness to take up the burden of all this business when the governor gets ready to lay it down."

"Ah, yes, that is an idea that many wealthy fathers have."

"Well, none of it for me, thank you!" the young man exclaimed, in a disgusted way.

"I am not anxious to spend all my life in grabbing for money, particularly when there is plenty to start on."

"You take a sensible view, it seems to me, and when you come in possession of your father's wealth you will be able to enjoy life."

It was an apparently careless speech, but there was a deep purpose back of it; the detective desired to ascertain what the young man's ideas were on this subject.

A gloomy look appeared upon Maurice's face, and he shook his head.

"I don't think that time will ever come," he replied.

The disguised detective affected to be much astonished.

"Is that possible?"

"Indeed it is."

"But I don't understand how that can be."

"A want of confidence, that's all!" the other exclaimed with a dry laugh.

"Explain! that is if it is not a private matter, but perhaps I am rash in asking you to give me your confidence," the other said with a great deal of delicacy.

"Oh, no, I don't mind telling you all the particulars for I know that you are a friend and that I can trust you," and the young man reached over and shook the Cuban's hand in an effusive way.

The wine at last had begun to take effect.

"I think I may say without descending to flattery that I am a man who can be depended upon," the disguised detective replied.

"Oh, you are all right, but, mind, this is in strict confidence, you know, for the governor is not aware that I have got on to his little game."

"Do not give yourself any concern in regard to that," the Cuban exclaimed.

"As my father was the first of his name who ever succeeded in making anything it was a pet idea of his to be the founder of a family. He was to be the first great man of the Englebert line, I the second, and then my son, or sons were to carry out the scheme; a second house of Astor, you understand?"

The other nodded.

"But he has already come to the conclusion that the idea cannot be worked. I am the wheel which drops out and deranges the machinery," the young man declared with bitter accent.

"Now, my dear Alvarado, I want you to understand that I am not a bad fellow and my old man doesn't think I am either."

"You have not known me very long, and yet you can be satisfied that you know me about as well as you will after we have been acquainted for a couple of years."

"I must say I have not discovered that you possess very bad traits," the other remarked.

"That is the truth, I am not a business man, and not a hard worker; in fact, I believe I was born tired," Maurice declared with a smile.

"I am fond of a good time and spend money pretty freely, play cards and billiards with the boys once in a while for small stakes, but I never lose heavily, and I defy my worst enemy to say that I am given to dissipation, for I am neither a drunkard nor a gambler."

"Most certainly not!" the disguised detective exclaimed. "I am satisfied in regard to those points by what I know of you."

"My governor understands me thoroughly, and we get on very well together, although he is extremely mean with me in regard to my allowance," the young man declared.

"Another thing, I don't run in debt to any extent but try to live within my allowance to the best of my ability; I get behind a few hundred dollars once in a while, as in the case of this tailor, but it is not a common occurrence, although if I wanted to I could find plenty of people who would be willing to trust me to the extent of hundreds of dollars, calculating that if I did not pay, the old man would."

"That is always the case; the son of a rich man seldom has any difficulty in getting credit."

"Well, I have always striven to keep out of debt so that no creditors of mine would be able to annoy the old man, by running to him with the expectation that he would settle my bills."

"It seems to me that you have acted in a very praiseworthy manner," the Cuban remarked with an approving nod.

"But the governor doesn't appreciate it!" the young man declared with a deep frown.

"Is that possible?" the other exclaimed, his tone expressing profound surprise.

"Yes it is, and I will tell you how I know. This is a profound secret, mind, and I rely upon you never to mention a word of it to any one," the son added, lowering his voice to a cautious tone and at the same time casting a scrutinizing glance around so as to be sure that there wasn't any one near enough to overhear the conversation.

There were no eavesdroppers near though; the table at which the two sat was in a corner and no one was within twenty feet of them.

"Oh, you need not trouble yourself about that!" the Cuban declared.

"I know that what I say is true, for my father has made arrangements so that at his death neither my sister nor myself will inherit his property," Maurice said, in a tone barely above a whisper.

"Upon my word, you astonish me!" the other declared, affecting to be profoundly amazed.

"It is a fact! No guesswork about it, you know."

"You are certain that there isn't some mistake?" the Cuban asked, as if reluctant to believe that it could be possible.

"Yes, I know that the statement is correct. The old man has tied his property up as long as the law would let him. Rosalind and I get five thousand dollars a year apiece, and the rest of the property is held in trust until our grand-

children come of age, which is as long as the law will allow him to keep the estate together."

"Yes, I understand. I have heard of such cases, although I am not very well-posted in regard to the law in this country."

"His idea is to fix the estate so I cannot squander it, for he evidently has an idea that I would make ducks and drakes of the money if I got a chance, and then, too, he is afraid that some fortune-hunter will capture Rosalind," Maurice explained. "My sister is not remarkable for her beauty, you know, and the fellows who come after her are about all attracted by the belief that she will have plenty of money when the governor kicks the bucket," the young man remarked in a flippant way.

"Yes, I have heard him speak in regard to that subject, and he said he would take care that no fortune-hunter made a prey of his daughter."

"The old man keeps a good watch over her, but Rosy is a sensible girl, and not apt to make a fool of herself. But I can tell you what it is, Alvarado, I feel hurt about this will business!" Maurice declared, with great bitterness. "I can't help myself, though, but it is rough treatment."

The Cuban agreed to this, and the conversation ended at this point, for the repast being finished, they arose and departed.

Joe Phenix fancied he had secured a clew.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CONFESSION.

JOE PHENIX was a man who always kept his eyes open, and he had not been many days in the Englebert mansion before he came to the conclusion that the most persistent suitor the daughter of the millionaire had was the young Englishman, Somerdyke.

He went about his wooing in a very quiet, unobtrusive way though, but the disguised detective noticed that he did his best to make himself agreeable to the lady, and was always on hand, when he was in the house, to attend to her wishes, and often seemed to anticipate her wants.

Taking advantage of the favor with which the young lady regarded him, Joe Phenix determined to sound her in regard to the secretary's attentions.

As it happened he got an opportunity to hold a conversation with her in the parlor one evening after dinner was ended.

It was the first chance that he had had to speak to her when no witnesses were by, and the disguised detective was prompt to improve it.

"What has become of your devoted cavalier?" he asked, as he took a seat on the opposite side of the window by which she sat.

She laughed a little and affected not to understand who was meant, saying:

"Don't speak in riddles, for I am not good at guessing."

"Why, I mean Mr. Somerdyke, of course; there isn't any one else who pays you so much attention."

"Well, I presume that the gentleman is attentive," the girl observed, slowly, a little bit of color appearing in her cheeks. "Still, as my father's secretary, I suppose he thinks he ought to be polite to me."

"I have been watching the young man for the last two or three days and—I trust you will pardon my curiosity—I have been speculating as to whether you were disposed to favor his attentions or not."

Again the girl seemed to be a little confused, and she hesitated for a few moments before she answered, but at last, she said:

"I see that you are willing to admit that curiosity is not confined entirely to the female sex, and since you condescend to make the confession, I am disposed to submit to a little cross-examination."

"I trust you will not think that I am obtrusive in speaking about the matter, for I assure you that if I had not learned during my short sojourn in the house to take the deepest interest in your welfare, I should not trouble myself about the affair," the Cuban remarked, with all the polite gallantry of the old-time gentleman.

"Oh, yes, I understand that," the girl replied. "And you can believe that I appreciate the interest you take in me, so I do not mind making you my father confessor."

"I am a strange, odd creature, you know; I believe I am entirely different from the rest of the girls, for I never had any girl friend to whom I felt like confiding my secrets, but I know that it is a relief to speak about such matters to some one."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly!" the Cuban declared. "There is an old adage, you know, which says that a frank confession is good for the soul."

"I do not doubt that there is a great deal of truth in it," the young lady observed. "But, really, when I come to think of it, I don't know as there is much for me to confess."

"You surely are aware whether the attentions of this gentleman are agreeable or not," the other urged.

"Oh, yes, I know that, of course; they are! I can decide that question without any trouble; but if you question further and ask me whether

I shall ever be willing to let the gentleman be more than a friend to me, then I should be puzzled to reply."

"That ought not to be the case," the disguised detective urged. "You ought to know your own mind."

"Well, I do not," the girl replied, slowly. "And that is the reason why I am willing to discuss the matter with you, in hope, you know, that by talking it over I will be able to come to a decided opinion."

"Ah, yes, but you ought not to have any doubt about the subject, and from the fact that you have doubts, argues to me that your heart is not deeply affected."

"I think you are right in that assumption. I do not believe that it is," Rosalind replied, frankly.

"You must remember that I occupy a peculiar position," the girl continued, after a slight pause. "I am the daughter of a millionaire—of a man supposed to be one of the richest men in New York, this city where money kings abound, and under the circumstances any young man who pays me attentions lays himself open to the suspicion of being a fortune-hunter, unless he happens to belong to a family possessing great wealth, and as I am very far from being a beauty, you know, it is not likely that I would attract men who have money enough to be able to choose a wife without regard as to whether she was rich or poor."

This declaration was made with a frankness which seemed almost painful.

"My father has always had a fear that I would become infatuated with some gentleman who only sought to win my love because he fancied I was a great heiress, and so he takes pains to let it be known that I will not inherit much money. I can depend upon a good income, enough to support me in comfort, but his fortune will be kept together, for it is his idea to have Maurice go on in the path which he is now treading."

"Ah, yes, I see," the Cuban remarked.

This speech made it plain to him that the girl had no suspicion of the existence of the will which troubled the son so much.

"Mr. Somerdyke, being in your father's confidence, undoubtedly understood this," the disguised detective continued, in a reflective way.

"Oh, yes, he certainly does."

"Then it is plain that he is not a fortune-hunter."

"No, unless he has taken it into his head that my father is not in earnest in regard to this declaration," the girl remarked, slowly.

The gentleman looked surprised.

"Why should he think that he is not?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. I am not sure that he does, you know; that is only a random thought of mine."

"But from the fact that such an idea came into your mind, I should suppose that you do not place as much faith in the young man as you might."

"Yes, I have no doubt that it is true," the girl replied, reflectively. "And I do not exactly understand why I should have such a notion either. I suppose that it is because I am situated as I am. I have heard so much of fortune-hunters that it has made me distrustful, I presume, and now I have arrived at that stage when I begin to question the motives of all young gentlemen who pay me any particular attention, that is, unless they are independently wealthy."

"It is my belief that the right man has not come along yet," the disguised detective remarked. "For when the man does come who is able to touch your heart, you will not feel any distrust, or any doubt in regard to his motives."

The face of Rosalind brightened, and an eager look came into her eyes.

"Yes, that is just what I have said to myself a hundred times!" she exclaimed. "It is an old declaration that a woman's instinct is better than a man's reason, and I believe there is a deal of truth in the saying."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly!"

"Now in this case, when Mr. Somerdyke tries to be so attentive—so desirous of making me as comfortable as possible, I try to say to myself, 'Here now is a gentleman who is actuated by a sincere affection,' but, somehow, there is a doubt in my mind as to whether it is the truth or not."

"My dear Miss Rosalind, I am an old and experienced man of the world," the Cuban observed in a grave and impressive tone. "I doubt very much if there is a man of my years in existence who has seen any more of life than I have, and it is my opinion, founded upon my experience, that we mortals should give a deal more heed to impressions of this kind, of which you speak, than we do; I am satisfied that we would save ourselves from some severe reverses if we did."

"Yes, I believe you are right," the girl replied, thoughtfully.

The entrance of Maurice into the room at this point brought the conversation to an end.

Joe Phenix though had obtained the information which he desired, and after he had

retired to the solitude of his apartment he meditated upon it.

"If this was a subject to bet upon I would go a hundred to one that the girl's impression is correct!" he declared.

"This Somerdyke will bear watching in my opinion and I shall do my best to keep my eyes upon him."

"I must be careful how I set about it though, for I am satisfied that the fellow is as wary as a hawk, and if he detected that I was watching him all the fat would be in the fire."

A knock at the door interrupted Joe Phenix's meditations.

"Come in!" he exclaimed.

The door opened revealing Red Jim McGorgle.

The ex-convict was attired in a neat dark suit and looked the careful, well-trained servant to the life.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but did you drop a five dollar bill in the parlor after dinner?" Red Jim asked.

"No, I think not, but come in and close the door while I see," the disguised detective replied, immediately realizing that there was some trick in this inquiry.

Satisfied of the completeness of his disguise he was convinced that Red Jim had no suspicions as to who he was.

The other entered and closed the door after him.

Joe Phenix was seated in a chair by the window at the end of the room.

"If you will have the kindness to examine your money, sir, maybe you will be able to tell whether it is yours or not," Red Jim remarked as he advanced toward the disguised detective and displayed the five-dollar note.

"I think it is, sir, for I found it directly under the chair in which you sat," he added as he halted before the supposed Cuban.

"What little game are you up to now, Jim?" Joe Phenix demanded.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PLOT.

AN expression of intense astonishment appeared upon the face of McGorgle at being thus familiarly addressed.

The reader must bear in mind that the detective's disguise was so complete that the ex-convict had not the slightest suspicion that he was anything but what he appeared to be.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I don't think that I exactly understand what you mean," Red Jim remarked, completely puzzled.

"Well, now, that is strange, for I certainly spoke plainly enough. I asked you what little game you were up to, Jim?"

The amazement of the other increased, and it was evident, too, that he was a little alarmed as he puzzled over the situation.

That the Cuban should know his name was not strange, for when he entered the millionaire's service he had given his true appellation, and it was more than possible that the guest had learned his name from some one, but the other's inquiry in regard to a game astonished him, for he could not comprehend how such an idea could come into his head.

"Oh, yes, sir, I heard what you said plainly enough, but I don't understand what you mean by asking me what game I am up to, sir."

Joe Phenix laughed.

"My disguise must, indeed, be a perfect one if it is not possible for an old stager like yourself to detect who I am," the man-hunter remarked.

Red Jim stared in wonder for a moment at the other, then he came nearer and surveyed him for a few moments with the greatest attention.

"Well, ain't you able to make out who I am?" the detective asked.

The look of perplexity vanished from the face of the other, a low whistle escaped from his lips, and then he chuckled:

"I wish I may die if I would ever have tumbled to you if you hadn't give the thing away," he declared.

"You have discovered who I am at last, eh?"

"Oh, yes, I ain't altogether blind, you know, but I must say that your get up is just perfect, and although I know pretty well how clever you are at this sort of thing, yet I would not have believed you could have fooled me so completely."

"I have not had any report from you so I suppose you have not made any discoveries, although this five-dollar business looks as if some game was on foot."

"Right you are!" Red Jim declared. "But the thing only began a little while ago, so there hasn't been time for me to make a report. I should have tried to have seen you to-night though, so as to let you know how the thing was running."

"No move made then until to-day?"

"Not a move!"

"Who is operating the thing? Give me all the particulars."

"I got the position here without any trouble, for when I applied to the butler, Thomas Cudlewick, and gave the name of John Oaks as reference, just as I was instructed to do, I was

taken on. I was a bit puzzled to know what to make of the thing, for the butler seemed to be a quiet, respectable old sort of a party, and any one to look at him would not be apt to suspect that he was the kind of man who would have anything to do with any crooked work."

"That is true."

"Everything was open and above-board. He spoke of this John Oaks as being an old acquaintance, and said he was a man whom he knew he could rely upon, and I got the impression that he hadn't any suspicion that Oaks was mixed up in any crooked work."

"You thought the butler was a dupe instead of being a confederate?"

"Yes, that is the idea I got, and nothing out of the ordinary run occurred until a few minutes ago, when the butler took me to one side and said, 'You understand, I suppose, why Oaks got you this situation?' He said this in the most quiet and matter-of-fact way possible, and for a moment or two I was bothered, for he seemed so unlike a man who would go in for any crooked work."

"He certainly does not look like a rascal," the detective observed. "I think I am a pretty good judge of men, and he would be about the last one in the house whom I would have picked out as being likely to be mixed up in any crooked business."

"Oh, he is a smooth old rascal!" Red Jim declared.

"Well, after I got a bit over my surprise, I said that I supposed I understood. I didn't let the cat out of the bag, for I wasn't sure that the butler was in the game, and I didn't want to make any blunder."

"That was wise," Joe Phenix remarked with an approving nod.

"Then Cuddlewick spoke plainer: 'John Oaks got you in here so that you might make yourself useful,' he said, 'and now the question is are you willing to live up to the agreement?'"

"That was certainly speaking right out in meeting."

"Oh, yes, there was no misunderstanding such plain talk as that, you know."

"Certainly not."

"Well, I up and said that I was a man of my word, and as I had made a bargain I did not propose to go back on it, and then I expressed my surprise at finding him mixed up in the affair."

"What did he say to that?"

"Oh, he laughed and replied that you couldn't always tell by a man's appearance what game he was up to."

"That is true enough."

"Then he said he was the man from whom I was to take orders. I answered that that was all right, and told him that I was ready to do whatever I was told, if the snap wasn't too risky."

"That was the way to put it!"

"Then he gave me this five dollar bill and told me to come to you and ask if you hadn't lost it, and to say that I had found it under your chair; the idea was that you would examine your money to see if the bill belonged to you, and he instructed me to take particular care to note the size of your roll, whether the bills were big or little, and to make as near an estimate as I could in regard to the amount of money you had."

"I have been carrying around this big roll of bills, and displaying them upon every possible occasion, as a bait to entice some crook to make an effort to 'win' the cash," Joe Phenix remarked with a smile. "But I must say that the butler is almost the last man in the house whom I would have picked out as being likely to make the attempt."

"He is a downy old rascal," the locksmith asserted.

"Is that all there is of the scheme?"

"Yes," the other replied. "Cuddlewick said that it was his opinion that you had a couple of thousand dollars in the roll, and that if you wasn't careful you might lose it, for in a big city like New York there were all sorts of smart rascals who were cunning enough to steal the pillows right out from under a man's head while he slept, and then he laughed as though he thought he had made a good joke."

"The idea is to find out whether I have got the money all right, and if you report that I have, it is very probable that an attempt will be made to relieve me of it to-night," the detective remarked.

"Yes, I suppose that is the idea, although nothing was said to me about tampering with the lock of your door."

"An expert is not required to attend to that matter," Joe Phenix replied. "I am out a great deal, you know; in fact, seldom in my room until midnight, or after, so there is plenty of time, and lots of opportunities, for any one to tamper with the locks in my absence."

"That is so."

"To-night, for instance, young Englebert and myself are going to the theater, and as we always have a little supper after the performance, it will be midnight by the time we get home, then a cigar and a chat in the smoking-room will take up another half-hour, so the chances are great that it will be one o'clock before I get to bed."

"Yes, you are right; an expert locksmith is not needed to put the fastenings of your room in such a condition that it will be an easy matter for any one to gain admittance without danger of waking you after you get to sleep."

"That is my calculation, and the chances are that your services will not be required. All that is wanted of you is a report in regard to the amount of money I possess, and in order to make a good one you must take a look at my wealth."

Then Joe Phenix produced the roll of bills, which he carried in such a careless manner.

"If you notice, the outside bills are twenties, then some fifty-dollar notes comes next, then twenties again, and if the rest of the roll corresponds with the first eight or ten bills, it would easily foot up to a couple of thousand dollars."

"Yes, but I am reckoning that it don't!" Red Jim exclaimed, with a grin. "You have fixed a decoy roll which is not anywhere near as valuable as it appears."

"You are about right, Jim," the detective replied, with a quiet smile.

"I do not see the use of a man lugging around two or three thousand dollars when he can make a couple of hundred answer the same purpose."

"There would not be any sense in it!" Red Jim declared.

"That is my idea. But in making your report, you will describe the roll as it appears, not as you suspect it to be in reality."

"Oh, yes, I understand that!"

"My scheme is going to work all right, I see," the detective remarked with an air which showed that he felt well-satisfied with the way matters were progressing.

"Somebody is going to make an attack on me and if I am as smart as I am supposed to be I will catch my man."

"And then through him you will be able to get at the fellows in the background who are putting up the job," Red Jim suggested.

"Yes, that is my idea, but just how I will work the scheme depends upon circumstances."

"Can I be of any assistance?"

"Not at present as far as I can see," Joe Phenix replied. "All you can do will be to keep your eyes open, and do not fail to be constantly on the watch. We have secured a clew and it ought to lead to important results."

The locksmith agreed to this and then took his departure, prepared to report that the Cuban had between two and three thousand dollars in his roll.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MILLIONAIRE IS ASTONISHED.

AFTER the spy departed the detective arrayed himself in his evening dress and prepared for his visit to the theater.

Upon descending to the drawing-room he found Maurice waiting for him.

Old Abe was also present, and had just finished perusing the evening paper when the Cuban entered.

"Where are you bound this evening?" he asked.

"I have taken a box at the Paragon Theater to see this new Spanish dancer who has created such an excitement," Maurice answered.

"Ah, yes, I have heard of her," the millionaire remarked. "Some gentlemen were speaking about the girl in the restaurant when I was at lunch to-day. They were at the next table and spoke quite loudly, so I heard all that was said. In fact, I couldn't help hearing the conversation, whether I wanted to or not; they were Spaniards and Frenchmen, but as the conversation was carried on in English I understood all that was said. They were very enthusiastic, declaring she was the greatest artist in her line who ever appeared in New York, and as they were men of education, who had evidently traveled largely, they were fully qualified to pass an opinion."

"That is the universal verdict, I believe," Maurice observed, "and some of the young fellows are fairly wild about her grace and beauty."

"I have seen notices in the newspaper praising her highly," the disguised detective remarked.

"There is no doubt that she is well worth seeing!" the son declared.

"I have a great mind to go with you!" Old Abe exclaimed. "I have no engagement to-night, and it is some time since I have treated myself to a bit of relaxation."

The others thought that it would be a good idea, and so the millionaire made one of the party.

There was a popular burlesque running at the theater, and when the party arrived they found the auditorium well filled, although it lacked some ten minutes to the time of beginning.

The famous dancer did not appear until the last act of the burlesque, and when the curtain descended at the end of the first act, Maurice said he would take a turn in the lobby, as he wanted to have a talk with some of the club-

men, but would be back in time to witness the dancer's performance.

So the millionaire and the disguised detective were left alone in the box.

Apparently a box in the midst of a crowded theater would be about as bad a place for holding a private interview as could be found, but in this instance the pair felt so safe from eavesdroppers that they did not hesitate to speak freely, although they were careful to draw their chairs together and converse in a low tone.

This was the first private interview that the two had had since the detective had made his appearance as the Cuban.

"I presume that you are Mr. Phenix?" the millionaire remarked. "Although I must admit that your disguise is so perfect that though I have been studying your features ever since you became my guest, I have not been able to trace a likeness, and if I had not been prepared for your visit I never would have suspected that you were anything but what you appear to be."

"Your supposition is right; I am the man."

"I must compliment you upon your disguise!" the millionaire exclaimed. "It is simply perfect!"

"That is one of the principal things in my business, of course," the man-hunter remarked.

"Well, have you succeeded in making any discoveries?"

"I have not been able to do much as yet," was the response. "This is a very difficult matter and it will take time."

"But can you say that you have made any progress at all?" the millionaire asked, anxiously.

"Yes I think I can give that assurance."

"That is good!" and Englebert rubbed his hands together in a gleeful way.

"I have so much faith in you, my dear Mr. Phenix, that I feel sure that if you succeed in getting hold of a clew you will be able to follow it up and unravel the whole of this deep mystery."

"I think I have made a beginning," the detective said in his modest way.

"And that reminds me that I have a bit of a cross-examination that I want to put you through."

"Certainly! go ahead!" Englebert exclaimed.

"Is it true that you have made a will, tying up your property so that it cannot be divided until the youngest one of your children's grandchildren becomes of age?"

The millionaire looked at the detective in amazement. Never did a man's face present a more perfect picture of astonishment.

"My dear Mr. Phenix, in the name of all that is wonderful, how did you come to know anything about this matter?" he exclaimed.

"I regret that I will not be able to explain that to you just now," the detective replied. "But is it the truth?"

"Yes, it is," the millionaire answered, evidently in a state of profound wonderment.

"My information is correct, then," and there was a deal of satisfaction in the detective's tone.

"Yes, it certainly is; but it is a mystery to me how you were able to discover anything about the matter, for it is a secret which I have not intrusted to a single soul."

"There is such a paper in existence, then?"

"Yes."

"A will giving an allowance of five thousand dollars a year to each of your children, and tying up the rest of your estate for the benefit of their grandchildren?"

"You have stated the conditions of the will correctly; but it is utterly inexplicable to me how it is possible that you, or anybody else, could ascertain anything about the matter, for I have kept it a profound secret!" the millionaire exclaimed, very much perplexed.

"Oh, well, such things will leak out once in a while," the detective observed.

"Yes, I know that; but in this case I have taken such precautions that I don't see how the matter could become known!" Englebert asserted, evidently very much disturbed about the matter.

"Even if the lawyer who drew out the document were trustworthy, some clerk in the office may have been able to get at the paper, and so betrayed the secret," Joe Phenix suggested.

"No, that is not possible!" the millionaire declared, in the most positive manner. "For I did not intrust the drawing out of the paper to any lawyer. I am lawyer enough myself to execute such a document, and I wrote the will without consulting with anybody. I did not want any long-winded document, full of all sorts of strange legal terms, which I believe these lawyers stick on for the purpose of making the meaning ambiguous, so that it is difficult for the average commoner to understand what it really meant."

"Yes, I see."

"I wrote the provisions of the will so plainly that any twelve ordinary men would not have the least difficulty in decided just exactly the way I want the matter arranged," the millionaire announced.

"Before I drew out the document I took

pains to post myself in regard to the laws bearing on the subject so as to ascertain just what I could do and what I could not do."

"That was prudent."

"And then I wrote the will myself, and as I said I made the provisions so plain that I flatter myself that no legal light, no matter how skillful he may be in the practice of his profession, will be able to baffle the minds of a jury in regard to my meaning."

"After the document was drawn out to my satisfaction I had two of my friends witness my signature, and I was careful, mind you, not to allow them to know aught of the paper excepting that it was my last will and testament."

"I see; you took particular pains to keep the contents of the document to yourself."

"Yes, and after it was duly executed I sealed it up in an envelope, put the inscription 'Private Documents' on the outside, and put it away in my safe."

"The safe in your office?"

"No, my private safe in the library in my mansion."

"Do you know if the document is in the safe now, all right?"

The millionaire looked surprised at the question.

"Well, it was there just after dinner to-day, for I had occasion to go to the safe and saw it," he replied.

"Can any one gain access to that safe but yourself?"

"No, certainly not!" the millionaire answered, decidedly. "I do not ever allow any one to go to the safe but myself, as it contains important private papers."

"According to your statement then it seems to be about as impossible as anything can be for any one to know the contents of this will?" the detective remarked, slowly.

"Yes, that is certainly a fact and yet you have told me exactly what it contains!" Englebert observed, and he shook his head as though he was surely puzzled by the circumstance.

"Well, I am not at liberty just at present to tell you how I got this information in regard to your will, for if you were in possession of the knowledge you might inadvertently betray the fact to the conspirators and so put them on their guard, thus rendering my task of capturing them much more difficult."

"Yes, yes, I understand that!" the millionaire exclaimed.

"My curiosity has been strongly excited, of course, for I do not see how it has been possible for any one to learn the particulars in regard to the will, but I am content to be patient, and wait until you think that it is time to explain the matter. I am content, you see, because I am satisfied that you have secured a crew which seems likely to lead to the capture of these bold rascals who have set out to make me a victim."

"As I stated, I certainly have made a commencement, and I think the chances are fair that in time I will be able to trap my game!" the detective declared.

The rising of the curtain put an end to the conversation, and as Maurice came in soon after the two did not have another opportunity to exchange opinions.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DETECTIVE PREPARES FOR A VISITOR.

The performance passed off without anything of moment occurring, and a little after eleven the party reached the millionaire's mansion.

Englebert had given orders to have a lunch ready on their return, and after dispatching it the three retired to their respective apartments.

After entering his room the disguised detective proceeded to examine the fastenings of the door.

As he had anticipated, the lock was only a common one, although elaborately finished and expensive.

"Of course the house of a private gentleman is not like a hotel," Joe Phenix remarked. "And when sleeping-rooms are prepared it is not considered necessary to furnish them with bolts and bars as a protection against nocturnal intruders."

"Any ordinary sneak-thief with a pair of nippers would not have any trouble in getting into this room, for with the tool he could easily turn the key from the outside."

"Now, then, let me see—what is my game?"

And the detective fell to meditating.

"I can erect a barricade easily enough so that it will not be possible for any one to enter the room without alarming me," he remarked.

"But that is not what I am after just now. I laid myself out to bait these fellows, and now that I have succeeded in getting a bite, it is my game to capture the man who tries to rob me."

"The chances are great, to my thinking, that there will only be one man to deal with. The job looks like an easy one, and although in cases of this kind the rascals usually go in pairs, yet, under the peculiar circumstances which attend this operation, it strikes me that it is more than likely that a single man will attempt to do the trick."

Having come to this conclusion, the detective prepared to receive his visitor.

He removed the clothes which he wore, dressed himself in another suit, and placed the discarded clothes in a careless way on a chair at the foot of the bed, and as the head of the couch was nearest to the door, this action made it necessary for any one to pass by the bed before the clothes could be reached, thus enabling the occupant of the bed to get between any intruder and the door if an attempt was made to get at the clothes.

"There, I think that will do," Joe Phenix observed, as he drew his revolver and laid it upon the bed after he had drawn down the outer spread.

Then he stretched himself upon the couch and drew the covering up to his chin so as to conceal the fact that he had not removed his clothing.

Before lying down he had turned the gas almost out so that only a "dim religious light" pervaded the room.

"Now, unless the man who sets out to work this trick is by far smarter than the common run of rascals I will not fail to get him into a very tight place," the detective observed in a very self-satisfied way.

Swiftly passed the minutes away. All sounds that told of life within the mansion of the millionaire ceased, and almost the only noises which disturbed the stillness of the night were those made by the wheels of some carriage, rolling by in the street without, transporting belated amusement-seekers to their homes.

Fully an hour passed and even the experienced detective, used to long vigils of this kind, felt that slumber was gradually stealing upon him.

"Come, come, this will not do!" he murmured as he sat bolt upright in the bed and rubbed his sleepy eyes vigorously for a few moments.

"I must not go to sleep and allow these rascals the satisfaction of getting away with my wealth," Joe Phenix murmured.

In order to entice the expected robber into his power the detective had arranged his clothes so that the long wallet in which he had placed his money stuck out of the pocket so that it could be readily perceived.

After having succeeded in waking himself up, the detective assumed a reclining position again, all his senses on the alert to detect the approach of the nocturnal marauder.

"If the trick is going to be worked to-night the fellow ought surely to put in an appearance during the next hour," the watcher mused.

"I wish he would hurry up. I don't relish staying awake half the night. It must be after two now, and if the fellow knows his business he ought to be aware that the time has come for him to operate, for a sleeper is much less liable to be disturbed by an intruder during the first two hours of his slumber than afterward."

The detective had made a careful study of such things and spoke by the card.

Twenty minutes more passed and Joe Phenix felt that sleep was again stealing upon him.

"Confound the rascal!" he muttered. "If he does not make his appearance pretty soon it will be a hard matter for me to keep awake."

But as he finished the sentence a slight noise coming from the entry attracted his attention.

It sounded as though some one tried the handle of the door.

"Oh, it is locked, of course," the detective muttered. "The Cuban is a careless man, but it stands to reason that he would not be likely to go to bed without locking his door, and if you expect to get in without having to take any more trouble than lies in turning the door-knob you are an extremely unreasonable sneak-thief."

"Come! get out your nippers and go to work in the proper way!"

Of course the reader understands that the acute detective did not tender this instruction in a tone sufficiently loud to reach the ears of the man in the entry, but the night-prowler went to work exactly as the man-hunter indicated.

The listening detective heard the key turn in the lock, although the man who was performing the operation by means of a pair of pincers with which he gripped the end of the key coming to the outside of the door, was using the utmost caution, striving to make the movement of the key noiseless.

Then, after the door was unlocked, the fellow who had performed the movement so skillfully, did not attempt to enter for a few moments.

The detective understood what this meant.

"Now he is listening at the key-hole in order to be sure that the moving of the key in the lock has not disturbed the inmate of the room," Joe Phenix muttered, and with grim humor he added:

"It is all right, my light-fingered friend! Don't you worry about that. You haven't disturbed any sleeper, and as far as that is concerned you can march on as soon as you like, although I have no doubt that you will be greatly astonished at the reception which you will get."

Just as the detective came to the end of his reflections, the sound of the door-knob moving came to his ears, and thus gave the warning that the intruder was about to enter the apartment.

Joe Phenix pretended to sleep.

The door opened slowly, and almost without noise, so carefully did the man who was moving it operate.

A head protruded into the room, and as soon as the owner of the head satisfied himself that his operation on the door had not disturbed the sleeper, the body followed in a snake-like movement.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN ASTONISHED MAN.

AFTER gaining entrance to the apartment, the intruder closed the door, but did not latch it; this was so his escape would be helped in case the sleeper awoke, and he was compelled to beat a hasty retreat.

After closing the door, he halted for a moment by the side of the bed so as to make sure that the occupant of the couch was fast in slumber's chain.

In his mind there wasn't really any doubt in regard to this, but long habit had made precaution natural to him.

The acute detective was feigning sleep so naturally, though, that even the lynx-eyed "cracksman" was completely deceived.

The intruder was a little, undersized fellow with a sharp face, strangely resembling a fox's countenance; he was dressed in a neat, dark suit, and any one encountering him in the entryways of the mansion would have been apt to mistake him for one of the servants of the household.

For all his humble, sneaky appearance he was dangerous though, and now as he stood by the bedside of the apparently sleeping man, he held a small sand-club in his hand, and he would not have hesitated a moment in bringing it down with tremendous force upon the head of the supposed Cuban if he thought there was danger of the sleeper waking up.

But the detective played his part so well that the night prowler was completely deceived, and he had halted for a moment in passing just because he was in the habit of so doing.

Then he stole with noiseless tread to where the clothes lay upon the chair, and a broad grin came over his face as he beheld the well-filled wallet protruding from his pocket.

Really it appeared as if he was going to win the prize without any trouble.

"As soft a snap as I ever struck!" he muttered as he reached out his hand to grasp the wallet.

Then the sound of the occupant of the bed moving attracted his attention, and as he grabbed the prize he cast a glance over his shoulder in order to see what the sleeper was about.

He did not anticipate any danger, for he thought the man in the bed had only made a restless movement as slumbers are apt to do.

But the sight he beheld was enough to make a man's hair stand on end, as he would undoubtedly have observed, if he had made any remark on the subject.

The man whom he had supposed to be buried in a profound slumber was sitting up in the bed, not robed for sleep, but fully dressed, and he had a cocked revolver leveled full at the person of the intruder.

The breath of the night marauder came thick and hard for a moment.

Never in all his career of crime had he ever been more surprised, and this red-headed, thin faced fellow was one of the noted criminals of America too, a man who had performed some marvelous exploits in his time, and the moment that Joe Phenix set eyes upon the foxy face he recognized the cracksman.

Spike O'Hoolihan he was called and hardly a prominent jail was there in the country that Spike had not been an inmate of during the past fifteen years.

What O'Hoolihan's first name was no one knew; he had been called Spike so long that if he had ever been known by any other appellation the fact was forgotten.

Of course it was not policy for the detective to betray that he recognized the man, for that would imply an acquaintance with the criminal-class which it was not possible for a stranger like the Cuban gentleman to possess.

So the disguised detective fixed his eyes with a stern gaze on the face of the aghast cracksman, and as he menaced him with the levelled revolver cried:

"Put that wallet down, you scoundrel, or I will put a bullet into you!"

Spike O'Hoolihan was not the man to show fight when taken at such a terrible disadvantage and the moment the Cuban's demand reached his ears he dropped the wallet back into the pocket with as much celerity as though it had suddenly become red-hot.

The cracksman was a man of quick and keen understanding, and from the tone in which the other spoke he was satisfied that he meant every word he said.

"That is good!" the disguised detective remarked in a satisfied tone. "I am glad to see that you are inclined to be sensible."

"I hope you won't be hard on a poor man wot yielded to temptation," the intruder wailed with a snivel.

"Oh, bless you, no!" the Cuban cried. "I

will not be hard on you. My first impulse was to shoot you on the spot!"

The cracksmen shivered, for the cool way in which the other spoke struck a mortal terror to his soul.

"And as I am a dead-shot the chances are about a thousand to one that if I had made a target of you, all you would have been fit for after I fired would be to fill up a hole in the ground."

The sallow, almost colorless face of the intruder grew pale as he listened to the careless words.

"That was my first thought, you know, but then I reflected upon the matter, and, luckily for you, at such times my mind works very quickly. I concluded that it was hard to kill a man simply because he was a thief, although I have no doubt that if you had a chance to escape you would not hesitate for a moment in striking a blow at my life."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't do no sich thing!" the cracksmen protested.

"Oh, no, of course not!" the other exclaimed, in a mocking way. "But, despite your assurance to the contrary, I would hate to give you the opportunity."

"You needn't be afraid that I would go for to do you any damage!" the intruder declared, in a very humble way, and as he spoke he shook his head, and endeavored to appear as meek as possible.

"I was a idiot for to go inter this 'ere thing, anyway," he continued. "But then I was tempted by the money! It is the first time I ever did sich a thing, and I humbly hopes you will take mercy on me and let me off, and I wish I may die if I ever get caught in such a scrape ag'in."

"Oh, this isn't your regular line of business then—you are not a professional thief?" the supposed Cuban questioned.

"W'ot, me?" Spike exclaimed, with a well-affected air of innocence.

"Yes, you, of course."

"Well, blow me tight if I ain't surprised now!" the cracksmen declared.

"Why, bless yer heart! there isn't no harm in me! I know I am in a pretty bad hole here, but I can explain it if you will only give me a chance."

"Go ahead! I am as patient a man as you ever met," the other replied. "But I warn you not not to make any mistake about this matter."

"Eh?" exclaimed Spike, with a blank look, "I don't believe that I know what you mean."

"Why, don't fall into the error that you can by your talk throw me off my guard so that you will stand a chance of escape, for you cannot work any trick of that kind, and you had better not try it on, for the moment I perceive any indication of trickery on your part I will drive a ball right through you!"

Again the cracksmen shivered, while his cheeks and lips grew pale, for the accents of determination were in the voice of the speaker.

"Oh, I wouldn't try no sich game!" Spike protested, but in reality that was just the idea in his mind.

He hoped during the conversation to throw the Cuban off his guard, and then with a sudden rush and the dextrous use of the sand-club, an escape might be effected.

He understood now, though, that there was no hope of getting out of the scrape by trying any trick of that kind.

The stranger was on his guard, and O'Hoolihan cursed the evil fortune which had given him into the power of such a man.

"If you value your life it would not be wise for you to try any scheme of that sort!" the Cuban declared.

"Oh, I ain't no sich man!" Spike protested. "I have been awful foolish in getting into this scrape, but if you will let up on me and lemme go this time, I will swear that I won't never git caught in no sich scrape ag'in!"

"Yes, but I want a little explanation first," the disguised detective remarked. "How comes it that you got the idea of robbing me?"

"Cos I see'd that you had plenty of money," the cracksmen replied, in a very innocent way.

"Yes, I understand that; but how did it happen that you ascertained the fact?"

"Why, I see'd the money in your hand."

"But where did you see it, and when?"

"The other day—when you were out to the stable, looking at the hosses."

"Well, I remember being out to the stable, but I don't recollect showing any money at the time."

"No, you didn't take out your wallet. I saw it in the inner breast pocket of your coat when it swung open."

"Oh, no! you did not see anything of the kind!" Joe Phenix replied, in the most decided way. "My coat was buttoned tightly, and you could not have discovered on that occasion that I had any money. You hav'n't told me the truth!"

"Wish I may die if I hav'n't!" O'Hoolihan exclaimed in a very sulky way.

"Oh, no! Come! it isn't of any use for you to attempt to deceive me, and if you are wise you will make a clean breast of it. You will fare

far better to tell the truth, for lying will not profit you in the least."

The cracksmen glared at the speaker for a moment as though he contemplated making a rush at him, but the leveled revolver, and the firm expression in the eyes of the Cuban, restrained him.

"I ain't giving you nothing but the honest truth!" he declared, sulkily.

"Are you employed by Mr. Englebert?"

"No, I ain't," was the reply slowly delivered, for O'Hoolihan did not relish being cross-examined.

"How did you happen to be in the stable then when I was there?"

"I came in to see one of the men, thinking I might git a job as I was out of work."

"That is probable," the Cuban commented.

"You can produce the man to whom you applied to bear witness to the truth of that statement?"

"Oh, yes!" the cracksmen answered without hesitation, thinking that it might be possible that he would succeed in deceiving his captor after all.

"What is his name?"

The question was carelessly put, just as if the speaker did not attach any particular importance to it, but the detective felt sure it would put the intruder "in a hole," to use the popular saying.

"Well, I ain't acquainted enough with any of the men to know their names," the cracksmen replied with a well-assumed air of innocence. "I just heard from fellows down at Bull's Head, you know, that there was a chance for a man up here and so I came up."

"That is a very fishy story, my man!" the disguised detective exclaimed with a decided shake of the head, strongly signifying unbelief.

"It's true! wish I may die if 'tain't!" Spike O'Hoolihan cried.

"Well, if your existence depended on the truth of that story I wouldn't like to take your chances. But we will drop that and come to something else."

The cracksmen looked surprised and uneasy, for he was not able to guess what was coming.

"How did you manage to get into the house?"

"I climbed over the wall into the rear yard and found a window which hadn't been fastened," the man replied slowly, and with evident reluctance.

"Now that is within the bounds of probability, the other remarked in a reflective way.

"Servants will be careless about windows, and then too the unfastened window might be due to some pal of yours inside the house, who unfastened the casement so you could get in."

Despite his self-possession this speech, so unexpected, caused the cracksmen to give a slight start and cast a quick look in the face of the speaker.

"A game of this kind is worked in that way very often, I believe," the disguised detective continued.

"I dunno!" the cracksmen responded sulkily.

"Now that you have accounted for your getting into the house will you have the kindness to tell me how it was that you managed to find your way to my room?"

The face of the jail-bird grew dark for he saw that he was in a corner, and one from which there was no escape, as far as he could discover.

"This is a large house—quite a number of rooms in it," the Cuban continued, finding that the captive did not seem inclined to speak.

"Now, how in the name of all that is wonderful did you manage to find your way to this particular room?"

The cracksmen shook his head in a dogged way but did not speak.

Spike O'Hoolihan was a man noted among his fellows for his ready wit, but cudgel his brains as he would no reasonable explanation came to him.

"My friend, you seem puzzled by this question, and hesitate to reply. What is the trouble?" the disguised detective inquired.

"W'ot is the use of my saying anything, when you won't believe me? You kin ax all the questions you like, I sha'n't say nothing more!" the cracksmen retorted.

CHAPTER XXX.

PUTTING ON THE SCREWS.

THE disguised detective indulged in a laugh, while the cracksmen glanced at him in an angry way, for he did not see any cause for merriment.

"You are quite right in declining to answer the question as long as you have made up your mind not to tell the truth about the matter, for I think it would puzzle a champion liar to devise a tale which would stand any chance of being believed."

"Of course it was a clear impossibility for you, a stranger in this house, to find the particular room occupied by me."

"It does not matter how shrewd or smart you are, you could not possibly have accomplished such a feat."

"But I did find it!" the cracksmen retorted in an ugly way.

"Yes, because you had a pal in the house who pointed it out to you," the Cuban exclaimed. "It is no use for you to attempt to deny that part, you know, because if it wasn't the truth you would never have been able to find the room."

"If you want to believe so it is all right, I ain't a-going to dispute with you about it, 'cos I see that you ain't a-going to take no stock in w'ot I say," Spike declared, angrily.

"You might as well save your breath. But now here is another point: who is your pal?"

"Oh, I will tell you that, of course!" and the cracksmen stuck his tongue in his cheek in derision.

"Why, that is the only chance that there is for you to get out of this scrape!" the other announced.

Spike O'Hoolihan gazed at the Cuban as if he did not comprehend the meaning of the speech.

"Don't you understand?" the disguised detective demanded.

"No, I don't think I do."

"You, the tool, have been caught, but I think I could afford to let you go if I could get hold of the man who planned this affair—the master, who put you up to the job."

The other shook his head.

"The idea doesn't strike you favorably, eh?"

"Oh, I can't do it!" Spike protested. "There isn't any master. Nobody put me up to the job."

"Nobody left the window open so you might enter without any trouble—no one stowed you my room so that you would have a clear field?"

"No, I 'aint got no pals!" the cracksmen declared, stoutly.

"Well, you will have to suffer then!" the Cuban exclaimed in a very decided way. "I will give you one last chance! Once you are delivered into the hands of the officers, you know, you are done for!"

"Tain't a banging matter, I reckon!" the cracksmen declared, doggedly.

Joe Phenix saw that it would only be a waste of time to discuss the matter further, so he concluded to bring the affair to an end.

The electric bell was within easy reach of his left hand so he pressed the button and the alarm rung out shrilly through the stillness of the night.

"Be careful and don't stir, my man, or I shall settle you!" the detective warned as he swung himself off the bed and opened the door, being careful to keep the cracksmen "covered" with the revolver while he executed the movement.

Spike O'Hoolihan was a desperate fellow, and had often taken desperate chances, and on the present occasion he would have made a rush and endeavored to escape if there had been the smallest opening offered him, but his captor never relaxed a bit in his vigilance, and the cracksmen was compelled to remain quiet until the house was roused.

Then the alarm was sent out for a policeman and in twenty minutes from the time that the Cuban pressed the button, Spike O'Hoolihan, with manacled wrists, was escorted from the house by a big policeman.

The Cuban accompanied the pair under pretense that as he had captured the fellow he was anxious to see him safely behind the bars, but in reality the disguised detective wanted to post the superintendent of police about the matter as he knew the prisoner would be carried before the chief first.

As Joe Phenix wired over his own signature that an important capture had been made, the superintendent hurried to his office to interview the fellow.

Before the cracksmen was introduced to the presence of the chief, Joe Phenix told his story, and the superintendent promised to do all in his power to aid the detective.

But when Spike was examined by the superintendent, he was as resolute in his denial that he had any pals as he had been with Joe Phenix.

He did not attempt to deceive the chief, though, by pretending that he was a novice in crime, for he knew the superintendent had his pedigree "down fine."

Threats and coaxing alike were vain to move Spike, and so he was lugged off to the Tombs, New York's famous jail, there to await his trial, and the parting words of the chief were not calculated to make the cracksmen feel comfortable.

"Since you are so obstinate I will do my best to put you through as quickly as the law will let me!" the superintendent declared.

After the fellow was gone, Joe Phenix and the chief had a conversation in regard to the situation.

The detective explained that he had entered upon the task of ferreting out the conspirators who were trying to "bleed" the millionaire, but he was careful not to say anything about the Silent Six, whose services he had enlisted, and requested the superintendent, as a particular favor, that he would not say anything to anybody about the affair.

The chief readily gave the required promise, saying:

"You are quite right to keep the matter secret. I think my men would have been able to do something in the affair if all the particulars had not been known to so many. It is an old saying, you know, that too many cooks spoil the broth."

The detective agreed to this, and after a few more words took his departure.

The capture of Spike O'Hoolihan was a beginning which argued a favorable ending in his opinion.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SPIKE SPEAKS.

Two more weeks went by.

Urged on by the popular clamor for justice in the newspapers the authorities had promptly brought Spike O'Hoolihan to trial.

The daily journals were impelled to their course by the fact that the cracksmen when searched after his capture was found to be a regular walking arsenal, having a pair of revolvers and a sailor's sheath-knife on his person in addition to the sand-club.

An eminent criminal lawyer was engaged to defend him, but that gentleman declared right at the beginning there was no hope of securing an acquittal when the proof was so strong in regard to guilt.

All that could be done under the circumstances was to get as light a penalty as possible.

The jury committed the man without leaving their seats, and the judge, in consideration that he was an old and hardened offender, gave him about as heavy a sentence as the law allowed.

After Spike was conveyed up to the river and put within Sing Sing's gloomy walls Joe Phenix's active brain conceived a scheme by means of which he thought the convict might be induced to make a clean breast of it.

So he removed his disguise, became Joe Phenix the detective again, and after procuring from the proper authorities the necessary papers entitling him to a private interview with Spike O'Hoolihan, he went to Sing Sing.

The warden of the State Prison, and, in fact, all the prominent officials, were well acquainted with the famous detective and were glad to be able to do anything to oblige him.

Spike O'Hoolihan was brought into a private room where Joe Phenix was in waiting to receive him, and the two were left there alone together.

Now though the cracksmen was known by sight to the detective, yet as the two had never come in contact with each other, Spike did not know the man-hunter.

Joe Phenix began the conversation by introducing himself, and then the other knew him well enough, for there were few criminals in the country of any standing who did not know Joe Phenix by reputation if they had been lucky enough not to make his acquaintance in a professional way.

But when Spike O'Hoolihan ascertained who the visitor was he looked at him in wonder, not unmixed with suspicion, for he had an idea that the visit boded no good to him.

Joe Phenix plunged into the subject at once, without making any preparatory remarks.

"I was in court the day of your trial, and I must say that in all my experience I don't think I ever saw a man railroaded into Sing Sing with more speed."

"Oh, yes, you kin bet yer sweet life that they fired me right through," Spike declared, with bitter assent.

"And your pals, too, seemed to be extremely backward in coming forward. How was that?"

The convict cast a quick glance, full of suspicion, at the detective.

"Oh, well, the game went ag'in' me in such a way that all the pals in the world wouldn't have been able to help me any."

"Most certainly none of them seemed to try," the detective observed. "You had a good lawyer, but he did not seem to work for you with his usual spirit."

"Well, I was caught so dead to rights that he said at the beginning there wasn't any chance for me."

"You were in a hole, and no mistake," the man-hunter declared. "I watched your case and there are some things in it that puzzled me, and that is the reason why I have come up here to have a talk with you about the matter."

"Oh, I don't believe I care to talk much," the convict replied, evidently suspicious. "I am here in the stone jug, all right, and I reckon all the talking in the world won't do me any good now."

"Possibly not, but if there was anything crooked about the job which landed you here, and you could give me a pointer so I could get hold of the man who put the thing up, I might be able to square the account for you."

"Something crooked about the job!" the convict exclaimed in wonder, which was evidently sincere and not feigned.

"Yes, it struck me so as I listened to the evidence which convicted you. It looked to me as if you had been led into a regular trap."

"Well, I don't exactly see how you make that out!" Spike exclaimed, scratching his red head in wonder.

"Haven't you had a suspicion that you were made a fool of?" the detective demanded in apparent wonder.

"No, blame me if I did!"

"I thought so at the time of the trial, but as it wasn't any business of mine I did not bother my head about the matter, but I happened to drop into Pat O'Donnegal's saloon last night and I heard some talk there among a party of crooks which rather opened my eyes."

"You were married to Big Annie, once I believe?"

The woman who bore this title was a notorious pickpocket who bore the reputation of standing at the head of her peculiar profession.

The face of the convict darkened and an oath came from his lips.

"Yes, that is true, but she jumped me about five years ago when I got sent up for using a knife on a cop!" Spike exclaimed. "She took advantage of my being in jail to get a divorce and then she went and married Murty Johnson who is in the same line as herself. She never liked it, you know, because I wouldn't try the pickpocket lay, but every man to his trade say I!" the convict said in conclusion with the air of a philosopher.

"Is it true that you have threatened to lay Johnson out if you ever run across him in a convenient place?"

"Yes it is!" the other replied with a fearful scowl. "But it isn't likely that I will ever get the chance, for the man was always like a hare whenever we met, although he is almost twice as big as I am and ought to be able to handle me without any trouble."

"He knows that you will use a knife on him in a moment, and that is what he is afraid of," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Well, that is where he is wise. I think I would be willing to take ten years to get a chance to lay him up so he would not trouble other men's wives for a while."

"He knows that, and he will take a hack at you whenever he gets the chance," Joe Phenix remarked. "That is what the crooks were talking about last night, and it was their opinion that he put up this job on you, for all of them, like myself, think that you have been taken in and done for."

"Mebbe I have been played for a sucker," the convict remarked, slowly. "But if I have I did not know it, and I didn't suspect that any trick had been played on me, what's more!"

"Well, of course, I don't know all the ins and outs of the case, but from what knowledge I gained on your trial I must say that if you were not played for a flat, then it is mighty funny, that is all!"

"Let me show you the points which struck me."

"Of course, you did not work the trick alone. You had some pal in the house who let you in and who pointed out the door of the Cuban's room, and that pal was probably the man who put you up to do the job, for, from the nature of things, it was not possible that you could have got on to the fact that the Cuban always carried a large amount of money with him."

"Well, s'posen all this is as you say, I don't see anything crooked in it. If anybody put me up to the job and arranged it so I could do it up in good shape, I don't see how you kin argue that the party was giving me the double cross."

"Oh, everything is all right so far. All went on as was arranged beforehand, but after you got into the room how did you find things?"

The convict looked at the detective for a moment, a blank expression upon his face and then he shook his head.

"Things wasn't exactly rosy after you got in to the room, eh?"

"You kin bet yer sweet life they wasn't!" Spike exclaimed.

"The Cuban was apparently sound asleep when you passed him?"

"Yes, sound as a log! and I ain't no bungler, you know, to make any mistake 'bout sich a matter!"

"Oh, no, you have had too much experience," the detective observed.

"Well, the Cuban was all right when you passed him to win the wad, and a moment afterward he was wide awake, and had you covered with a revolver, getting you dead to rights!"

"Yes, and he worked the act on me so keen that I didn't have any chance for my life," the convict complained.

"Doesn't that look to you as if you had tumbled into a trap?"

"Well, yes, I dunno but what it does," the convict admitted, slowly.

"And this Cuban was all dressed too!" the detective urged. "Gone to bed with all his clothes on, but had taken the trouble to put those which he had worn during the day on a chair, so as to lead you to believe that he had undressed and gone to bed."

"By thunder! I never thought of that before!" Spike exclaimed, bringing his hand down with a forcible whack on his knee.

"If you will reflect upon the circumstances you will see that it was a trap!" Joe Phenix

urged. "And you were caught in it too as nicely as any rat was ever caged."

"That is so!"

"It is apparent to me that the Cuban was warned by some one that there was danger of a robber coming in the night, so he prepared to receive the intruder."

"Yes, he received me to the queen's taste," the convict observed with a sardonic grin.

"Now then, who could have warned the Cuban but your pal—the man who planned the job? No one else knew anything about the matter—no one else could have given you away."

"That is so—curse the hound!" Spike cried with sudden ferocity. "I only wish I had him here now, and me with a knife in my hand. It would not take me long to square the account, I can tell you!"

"Now I will be open and above-board with you about this matter," the detective declared with an appearance of great frankness. "I want to get at Johnson, and I have not been lucky enough to trap him. He is mixed up with a gang of big fellows, and I am anxious to put the collar on the crowd, and I thought it was possible when I heard the crooks talking about your case last night that you might be able to help me."

The convict shook his head, much to the detective's disappointment.

"I am afraid that I will not be able to do much for you," Spike remarked, in a gloomy way.

"That is bad."

"Yes, I am mighty sorry, too, I can tell you, for I would be willing to do anything to get square with this thief of a Johnson!" the convict declared.

"That is natural."

"I kin see now that I was made a fool of, right from the beginning. I thought I was as keen as they make 'em, too; but the way this chap pulled the wool over my eyes was a caution."

"Give me the particulars; perhaps I can get a clew."

"There isn't much to tell. I was loafing in Pat O'Donnegal's saloon one night, when an old, gray-headed rooster came in, and after sizing me up, asked if I would have a drink with him. I took it, of course, and then we got to chinning together."

"He said he was on the cross, but allers made a point of working a quiet game; then he told how he had a good situation in the house of one of the big bugs up-town, and how there was a chance for a good man to take a big trick."

"I see, and then he proposed the robbery of the Cuban."

"Yes, and he talked so fair and square about the matter that I finally told him I would look the ground over, and if things were as they were represented, I would go in with him on the job."

"And you did so?"

"Yes, he opened the gate in the yard, and let me in, and then we went up-stairs and removed the fastening of one of the windows which looked out on a back veranda, so as to make it appear as if some man had climbed on the veranda, and got in that way, and then he showed me which was the room, and while I operated on the door he went to the head of the stairs, so as to be able to give warning if anybody appeared."

"That was so as to be out of the way when the trap was sprung on you," the detective remarked.

"Yes, curse him! I see it now! Oh! when I get out of this, I will get square both with him and Johnson, if it costs me my life!"

"What name did this man give you?"

"Oaks—John Oaks."

The man-hunter reflected for a minute.

This was the same party who approached Red Jim McGorgle.

"The man lied to you as far as being employed in the house goes," the detective remarked. "I have done a little business for the party who owns the mansion and being well acquainted with all the inmates of the house know there is no old man like Oaks in the place."

"Well, he is the man who let me in, and he seemed to know all about the inside of the house too."

"Have you seen, or heard from him since the night when you were nailed?"

"Yes, I got a note the very next day. All it said was that he was very sorry I was in trouble, wished he could help me, but couldn't as he was obliged to go away."

"You came to the conclusion, of course, that he, having become frightened, had cut and run?"

"Yes, that is what I thought."

"Well, there doesn't seem to be much here for me to go on," the detective observed in a reflective way.

"You know as much about the affair now as I do," the convict replied.

"Much obliged to you all the same, and if I get a chance at Johnson you can depend upon it that I will give him an extra lick on your account," the detective declared as he took his departure.

During his ride to New York in the railway

train Joe Phenix meditated deeply upon the situation.

"The only old man in the house, the butler Cuddlewick, does not answer to the description of John Oaks at all," he murmured.

"It is some one then in disguise, but who? That is a riddle which I must solve and I will set about it at once too.

"I have my suspicions as to the party and I think that already I can see the beginning of the end.

"Another point, this secretary is after the millionaire's daughter, and I think that Englebert ought to know it. I hate to spoil sport, but in this case it is my duty to put the father on his guard."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DISCLOSURE.

JOE PHENIX was one of those inflexible men who went straight to the end he proposed when he had once made up his mind, and so he sought an opportunity to speak to the millionaire in regard to the very evident desire that the secretary had to win favor in Miss Rosalind's charming eyes.

There were certain conditions necessary in Joe Phenix's opinion before the time was ripe for the disclosure, and these conditions were not fulfilled until one day, about a week from the time that the detective had the interview with the convict at Sing Sing.

The millionaire had gone to his library to smoke an after-dinner cigar and take a look at the evening journals.

The disguised detective joined him there.

The reader will bear in mind that Joe Phenix had again assumed his disguise, and was now masquerading as the Cuban.

He took a seat on the other side of the table from where Englebert sat, accepted a cigar which the millionaire tendered, lit it and then began the conversation by observing:

"Did you notice that account in one of the morning papers of the banker's clerk who was robbing his employer, right under the banker's nose, as it were, and yet the principal never noticed that anything was wrong until strangers called his attention to the matter?"

"Yes, I read the story, and I presume that it is a very common case," the millionaire replied. "Men often fail to see what is going on before their own eyes."

"Yes, that is true, and it is my notion that something of the sort is happening in the very house right at the present time."

Englebert laid down his newspaper and stared at the speaker in surprise.

"Why, is that possible?"

"I think it is."

"Explain yourself, I beg."

"You have a very charming daughter."

"Rosalind—yes."

"Getting about old enough now to think of marriage, I should judge."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the millionaire, his alarm evidently excited by the remark. "She is only a child yet."

"Over eighteen, I believe?"

"Yes, but she is young for her age, and I do not believe she has any ideas of the kind."

"But it is natural when a girl gets to be eighteen or nineteen for her to think of beaux and marriage, you know, particularly when she is so well situated as your daughter certainly is."

"Yes, I am aware that this is a fast age we live in and girls are now beginning to think about marriage at an age when they used to be content with playing with their dolls."

"That is correct."

"But I do not think my Rosy is one of that kind, although I am aware that she is not particularly childish in her ways. That is because I have always made her a sort of companion I suppose," the millionaire explained. "Then she never seemed to care much for going out and I am certain that there isn't any one of the young men who comes here who pays her any particular attention."

"I have not been blind about this matter, I assure you, although I imagine from your remark that you are under the impression that I have not been on the lookout."

"My dear Mr. Englebert, I think that in your case it is as I stated in the beginning, men often do not see what is right under their noses."

"I feel sure that you are not speaking lightly on this matter!" the millionaire exclaimed, in an anxious way.

"Oh, no! rest assured that I am not!"

"May I ask if you have observed anything then which you think has escaped my attention?"

"I think I have."

"Explain, please, for I can assure you that I have no notion of allowing my daughter to get married for some time yet—five or six years, anyway."

"How would you like this young Englishman, your secretary, Mr. Somerdyke, for a son-in-law?"

"What?" ejaculated the millionaire, with a very red face, completely taken by surprise by the question.

The disguised detective laughed at the consternation of the father.

"I judge from your manner that the idea does not please you?"

"My dear sir, you do not really mean to say that there is any danger of such a thing happening?" the millionaire exclaimed, deeply agitated.

"No, to do your daughter justice, I do not think that there is a great deal of danger, for she does not seem to care for the attentions of the gentleman, but there isn't any doubt that if it depended upon the man he would marry Rosalind to-morrow if she would consent to have him."

"Oh, this is monstrous!" the old gentleman declared. "I will admit that this is a most complete surprise for me, for I had not the slightest suspicion that Somerdyke would be vain enough to think I would consent to his wedding my daughter. Of course, he is after the girl for her money, but he would find himself very much mistaken if he got the girl to marry him with the expectation that he would get a good bit of money with her, for I can assure you that if anything of the kind should happen I would not give the girl a dollar!"

"Well, under the circumstances I don't think you could be blamed if you did act in that way," the Cuban remarked.

"Of course not!" the millionaire exclaimed. "It is my duty to protect my daughter from the wile of a fortune-hunter."

"I am very much astonished that I did not notice this thing before, for now that you speak of it I remember that the fellow has been very attentive to Rosalind, but I never took any particular notice of the matter, thinking, of course, that he was merely anxious to show how he appreciated the kindness with which I have treated him."

"That was natural, for all that the man is he owes to you."

"Certainly! there is no doubt about that!" Englebert declared. "But it is just as you remarked, men are sometimes singularly blind to what is going on right under their noses."

"Well, you have got your eyes open now and can take measures to prevent your daughter from making any error of this kind. Young and romantic girls often allow themselves to be deluded into the belief that they have fallen deeply in love, when, in reality, the feeling they have is but a mere caprice which would soon pass away if they were left to themselves."

"Yes, yes, I understand that!" Englebert exclaimed. "You are right! not a doubt of it. But I think you have spoken in time, I will have a conversation with Rosalind upon the subject. I have always found her to be a truthful, honest girl and I have no doubt that when I question her about the matter she will tell me just how she feels."

"If I might suggest—it is a delicate matter, I know, for a stranger to interfere, but I am going to be presuming enough to take the liberty—you will not speak harshly to your daughter," the disguised detective observed. "It is always well to use policy in a matter of this kind."

"You are quite right," the millionaire observed. "By an assumption of great harshness in the beginning I might frighten the girl and prevent her from giving me her full confidence."

"Yes, I have known of fathers making a mistake of that kind, and by using undue harshness really brought on the calamity which they were striving to prevent."

"You need not fear that I will make any such mistake," Englebert asserted. "I comprehend the situation too well. Young girls are sometimes very willful creatures, I know, and if I asserted my authority in a harsh and disagreeable way—should I attempt to play the role of the stern parent in fact—the spirit of contradiction might make Rosalind rebellious, whereas if I talk to her in a mild and kind manner, merely inquiring how she felt about the matter, and giving no hint whether I am going to be displeased or not, if she has taken into her head to fall in love with the man it is about as certain as anything can be that I shall be able to learn exactly how she feels about the affair."

"Yes, I think the chances are good that you will learn the truth. And now, while I am conversing upon this subject, I suppose I ought to warn you that there is another member of your family that needs looking after."

The millionaire looked surprised.

"Do you refer to Maurice?" he asked.

"Yes, to that young gentleman, and unless all signs fail he is in much greater danger of making a fool of himself than your daughter."

"Is that possible?" Englebert exclaimed, evidently much annoyed.

"That is the idea that I have formed."

"You astonish me!"

"The girl with whom he has fallen in love is right in the house here too."

The millionaire bent his eyes in a thoughtful way upon the floor, reflected upon the matter for a moment, and then said:

"The only person I can think of is my daughter's maid, this Lawrence girl."

"That is the party."

"You don't mean to say that Maurice has been

idiot enough to fall in love with my daughter's waiting-maid?" the old man exclaimed, evidently much irritated.

"I fancy that it is the truth. She is not a remarkably beautiful girl, but she is rather showy and dashing-looking, and your son has become infatuated with her, judging from a conversation that I overheard last evening. I was in my room with the door ajar, and had not lighted the gas; the two met just outside in the entry, and I overheard all that passed between them."

"I do not doubt that the girl is something of a flirt, like the most of her sex, and she is doubtless flattered at attracting the attention of a millionaire's son, but she is not half so foolish in her notions as your young gentleman."

"Is that possible?" the father exclaimed, evidently highly annoyed at the intelligence.

"Yes, it is the truth. He talked in a very foolish way; proposed that the girl should run away with him."

"The idiot!" Englebert cried, angrily.

"The girl laughed at the idea and said she couldn't think of doing such a thing. She had a good place here and she had no mind to give it up."

"She was sensible, and if she knew anything of the world, and of young men of the Maurice stamp in particular, she would understand that there wasn't any dependence to be placed upon their promises," the old man observed. "Even if my son was fool enough to marry her his infatuation would not last long. When his money was gone—and he is not a man who would be apt to work hard to gain more, then he would be certain to regret that he was fool enough to tie himself down to a wife, and the result would be that she would wake up some morning and find she was deserted."

"Yes, I have no doubt that your anticipations would be realized, but I fancy you will have a harder time in getting your son to yield to your wishes than in controlling your daughter."

"Ah, I have no doubt about that, although I will do him the justice to say that he has not given me much trouble, and I trust I will be able to talk him out of this infatuation. I might discharge the girl I suppose," and the millionaire looked at the disguised detective in a peculiar way. "But I don't suppose that would do any good. If she left the house he would be apt to follow her, no matter where she went."

"That would be very probable," the other remarked. "Then, too, if she lost her place it might induce her to accept his attentions, which now she is rather reluctant to do."

"I will have a talk with him and see if I can't bribe him to give the girl up. He is always in want of money and if I give him a couple of thousand dollars for a European trip he might accept the offer."

The Cuban thought that this was a good idea and this brought the conversation to an end.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RESOLUTION.

NEXT to the library was the smoking-room, and in this apartment at the time that the conversation related in the last chapter took place, sat the two men whose names had been so freely mentioned, Maurice Englebert and the secretary, Lysander Somerdyke.

The door was ajar so that the pair were enabled to overhear every word that was said.

The two kept perfectly still until the conversation ended, and then Somerdyke beckoned to young Englebert and the pair glided noiselessly from the room.

The secretary led the way to his apartment, which was on the third floor of the mansion, lit the gas and closed the door carefully.

Maurice had thrown himself into a rocking-chair, looking utterly disgusted.

After closing the door Somerdyke also seated himself.

If the reader remembers, when we began the last chapter we said that the disguised detective did not make his revelation to the millionaire until certain conditions were fulfilled.

What we meant by that was that he wanted one or both of the two to overhear the conversation, and yet he did not want them to think that he was aware they were in the neighborhood.

The reason for this will appear in due time.

For a few moments neither of the two spoke; Somerdyke watched Maurice closely as he pulled the ends of his mustache, evidently very much disturbed, then the secretary said:

"Well, what do you think of the situation?"

"It is extremely rocky!" Maurice declared.

"And what the deuce has got into this infernal Cuban to make him interfere in a matter which does not concern him at all?" Somerdyke cried.

"Oh, don't ask me! It is a very strange affair all around. But I say, old fellow, I am afraid that your cake is all dough as far as Rosalind is concerned. The old man is onto you now, and you don't stand much chance to get her."

"Really, Maurice, I am not much disappoint-

ed for I do not think there has ever been much chance for me.

"As the Cuban justly observed, all girls are flirts, more or less, and your sister was pleased to flirt with me a little, but I don't think that she ever had any serious thoughts, and if it came to braving her father's anger for my sake I do not believe she would have thought of doing such a thing for an instant."

"It is all up now, anyway."

"Yes, and your little love affair has gone to smash, too."

"Oh, no, it hasn't!" Maurice asserted, decidedly. "The girl is dead in love with me and I don't care what the Cuban says about the matter. I am a better judge than he is, and if I should offer to marry the girl she would run away with me to-morrow."

"That may be true, but you need some money to run on. Love may be all very well, but it will not pay railway fares and board bills."

"Oh, yes, I am aware of that," Maurice replied. "But I say, old fellow, can't you think of some way to make a raise? You have got a wise head, and ought to be able to do it. Things are getting desperate, you know, and something has got to be done!"

"Yes, I am aware of that," the other replied, in a thoughtful way.

"The cunning scheme which we concocted has not turned out as we expected, although at first it promised well."

"Yes, you told me that you were afraid to go on, and warned me to be cautious, but you did not explain what the matter was," Maurice remarked.

"I could not at the time, for I did not know. I had an apprehension that danger threatened, but was not able to tell in what shape it was coming."

"You see, I am a firm believer in presentiments," Somerdyke added. "And when the mysterious impression that danger threatens comes to me I always pay heed to it."

"Well, I believe you are wise in doing so."

"Experience has satisfied me that it is the best course for me to pursue. In this case, I had a presentiment that danger threatened, and so I suspended operations, and I am glad that I did so, for now I begin to see where the danger lies."

"Is it possible?" Maurice exclaimed, his manner full of nervous anxiety.

"Yes, the house is filled with spies!"

Maurice gave a start, and glared around him as though he expected to behold some one at his elbow.

"And I have the impression that this man, who calls himself a Cuban, is the leader of the band."

"It seems incredible!"

"I know it does, but I feel pretty certain that I have not made any mistake about the matter. Have you not noticed that during the last month there has been a half a dozen new people taken into your father's service here and at the office?"

"Yes, that is true."

"Well, it is my impression that at least three of the six are spies."

"Do you think this doctor, whom my father professes to believe so highly in, is a spy?"

"Yes, for your father is not a man to give way to a whim of this sort. And then that new lady stenographer in the office, who without being anything of a flirt, goes out of her way to be agreeable. She is too prying, too inquisitive, and I believe she is a spy. There is another party too, whom I introduced into the house myself, thinking he would be useful, but it is my idea that the man has sold me out."

"We are in a regular net then!" Maurice declared, very much alarmed.

"Yes, but as it has not yet closed around us there is a chance for us to get out, but we must not lose any time in availing ourselves of it."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Take a trip to Canada. The treaty that puts a stop to that country acting as a haven of refuge for fugitives from the United States has not yet gone into effect, so we can find safety there. I am going, for I feel a presentiment that if I remain here I will be laid by the heels the first thing I know, and I am not willing to give up my liberty yet awhile."

"Oh, it is all very well to talk about making the trip, but where is the money to come from?" Maurice exclaimed.

"I haven't any, and I did not suppose you had much," the young man added.

"Your estimate is quite correct, but I can assure you that I don't intend to go without money!" Somerdyke declared.

"But how are you going to manage it?"

"In one of the inner drawers of the safe at the office there are fifty thousand dollars in cash which your father received this afternoon after banking hours, so he locked it up in the safe."

"Yes, but how will you be able to get at the money?" Maurice asked. "Father has the key and never trusts it to any one."

"Well, one of my favorite ideas is that a man ought to be always prepared for emergencies, and so some time ago I had a key made to fit that particular lock," Somerdyke replied with a smile.

"You see I calculated that some day your respected dad might place some valuables there and that I would want to get at them, so I am all prepared to transfer the money from the safe to my pockets."

"It is a daring scheme," the young man said, evidently lacking courage.

"Nothing else left for us!" the other urged.

"I can feel that we are being gradually ensnared, and unless we make some bold move of this kind we are done for! With the fifty thousand dollars we are independent. You can send for your girl and enjoy yourself like a prince!"

The temptation was a strong one and after a little persuasion on the part of the secretary the millionaire's son consented to go.

"We can manage the affair in fine style in spite of this army of spies!" Somerdyke declared.

"No matter how skillful and vigilant they are, we can evade them, for as yet no watch has been put upon us."

"Are you sure of that?" Maurice asked, anxiously.

"Yes, the fact is, the spies have not ascertained enough to justify the chief—who is the Cuban, to my thinking—in proceeding to take that step yet."

"If your suspicion is correct that this Cuban is a spy, I have made an idiot of myself," the young man remarked, in a gloomy way.

"How so?"

"Why, I was foolish enough, in a moment of weakness, when I had more liquor on board than was good for me, you understand, to tell him about the will my father made."

Somerdyke uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Well, that was an idiotic thing to do I must say!" he declared.

"I wouldn't have done it if I had been myself, you know," Maurice said, sheepishly.

"That declaration let the cat out of the bag, for it showed that you were able to gain access to the safe where the will was."

"With such a clew as that to aid them it is no wonder that the spies have been able to weave a web around us."

"But it is not too late for us to escape?" the young man questioned, apprehensively.

"No, we are all right if we act quickly," Somerdyke replied. "I have thought over a plan of operations. We are booked for the Alhambra concert hall to-night."

"Yes, that is the programme."

"We will go there, just as we arranged, and after the performance commences we will go into the wine-room, as if we wanted to have a chat with the performers when they come from the stage."

"There is a rear entrance so that you can go from the wine-room to the street in the rear of the building."

Maurice nodded; he was well-acquainted with the ins and outs of this favorite resort for the gilded youths of the metropolis.

"Then we can take a cab to the office, and as the watchman knows who we are, our late visit will not excite any surprise, particularly when we explain in a careless way that we are after some business papers for a customer who is abruptly called upon to depart from the city."

"Oh, yes, father and I have gone to the office in the evening half a dozen times in the last year."

"There is no doubt that we can secure the fifty thousand dollars without any trouble, and after we get it we can take the cab up-town, dismiss the man at one of the hotels, where we can have a drink, and then walk to the Grand Central Depot, where we can take a train for Montreal."

"The scheme is a capital one!" Maurice declared. "I will go in with you for I don't see any other course open to me!"

"It is the only way to break through the net which is gathering around us. If we remain in the city we will surely be trapped!" the secretary asserted.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TRYING IT ON.

At eight o'clock the two set out.

Maurice wanted to have a few minutes conversation with the dashing waiting-maid who had infatuated him, but the secretary objected so strongly to it that the young man gave up the idea.

"You can write a note to her while we are at the office, explaining that you are called out of town, and instructing her to write to you under cover of one of these private letter offices, from whence the letters can be sent."

The young man did not like the idea, but Somerdyke insisted upon it, so he yielded.

The programme was carried out exactly as the secretary had arranged.

The pair went to the concert hall, and after sitting for a few moments in the auditorium proceeded to the wine-room, then from there to the street, a cab was hailed and to the silent deserted business portion of the great city they proceeded.

The cab halted in front of the millionaire's office, for, as Somerdyke declared, it was their policy to play the boldest kind of a game.

After the fashion common to the important down-town offices, the gas was burning, turned about half on, so the pair had plenty of light for their operations.

After entering the office Somerdyke looked at his watch.

"Just nine o'clock," he remarked. "We will have time to catch the ten o'clock train if we get around lively."

"Yes, I think so," Maurice replied. He was very pale and agitated, although he had taken half-a-dozen drinks in the concert hall to brace him up, as he remarked at the time.

The two proceeded to the inner office.

Everything was progressing favorably. They had not even been put to the trouble of explaining their business to the watchman, as that worthy was not on hand, a fact which Maurice commented upon.

"Oh, he is up the street or around the corner, talking with some other watchman," Somerdyke replied. "They don't trouble themselves to keep a vigilant watch at such an early hour as nine, for there's no danger to be anticipated until around midnight, or the small hours of the morning."

"That is undoubtedly correct," Maurice remarked. "But I say, old fellow, let us hurry up; let us get our plunder and get out as soon as we can for I am in a fever of apprehension!"

The other laughed.

"Don't worry yourself!" he exclaimed, reassuringly. "Everything is going on all right! Inside of five minutes the fifty thousand dollars will be in our grasp, and in another hour we will be speeding on our way to Canada as fast as the iron horse can take us."

"Yes, I know all that, but I shall not breathe freely until we have crossed the line into Canada, for until then we will not be out of danger."

"Well, that is true, I know, but I feel as safe from apprehension as if we were already on the Suspension Bridge, safe from pursuit!" the secretary declared. "I am not going to lose any time though for all that."

And as he spoke he drew out his wallet and took a small safe key from an inner pocket, proceeding to the private office of the millionaire as he did so.

The safe there was a small one used by Mr. Englebert mainly for his own private affairs.

The combination was no secret to the secretary and he soon had the door open, then he applied the key to the inner lock, and the bolt shot back without the least difficulty.

"Ah!" exclaimed young Englebert, drawing a long breath. "I was very much afraid that the key would not fit."

"Oh, I wasn't taking any chances on that!" Somerdyke declared. "I have tried the key in anticipation of some such work as this and I knew it would fit."

"Here is the money, all right! All in big bills too so we will not have any difficulty in carrying it."

Then he took the money from the safe, locked the inner door and swung the outer one shut.

"Success crowns our efforts!" cried the villainous secretary.

"Success crowns my efforts!" responded Joe Phenix.

Then from the clothes closet at the end of the room came the detective, Joe Phenix and Englebert, red with rage.

The detective had cast aside his disguise, and now appeared in his own proper person.

Maurice stood like one stricken with a deadly stroke, but Somerdyke turned to flee; the road, however, was blocked by Joe Phenix's assistant, Tony Western, who stood in the doorway, pistol in hand.

"Stop where you are!" the detective commanded. "You are cornered, and cannot hope to escape."

Then the young man flung himself at his father's feet, and begged in the most piteous manner for mercy, wildly upbraiding the secretary as being the cause for his being led into crime.

"Oh, that is all right!" Somerdyke cried, angrily. "But you were easily led astray, you cur!"

Englebert was perplexed. The detective had not prepared him for this disclosure, for Joe Phenix had preferred to let the father see with his own eyes that his son was a rascal.

By means of a hole in the wall the detective had played the spy upon the conspirators and so was able to trap them.

The millionaire was in a quandary; he shrunk from exposing his son, and so resolved to hush the matter up, but as he did not want to punish Maurice the secretary of course got off, although Maurice confessed that it was himself and Somerdyke who had written the mysterious communications.

Joe Phenix had accomplished his task, aided by his Silent Six, but there was more work ahead for the detective and his band, for Somerdyke was a desperate man and swore to be revenged upon the millionaire, and when the tale of that effort is told it will be seen that the contest between the villains and the detective's Silent Six was a battle royal.

THE END.

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